

**University of Alberta**

**Buying Happiness:**

**English Canadian Intellectuals and the  
Development of Canadian Consumer Culture**

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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### **Abstract**

This dissertation explores intellectual responses to changing patterns of consumption during the period 1890 to 1960.

New ways of thinking about consumption emerged in response to rising abundance and increasing choice; however, certain themes persisted even as Canada changed. Criticism of consumerism took shape around three areas of concerns: the undermining of producer values, escalations in inequality and social instability, and the degrading effects of mass culture. A second discourse emphasized the utopian potential of increased consumption, which, many hoped, would allow Canadians to redirect their efforts towards personal, spiritual or cultural improvement. The creation of a national culture rooted in pre-modern visions of the land and the folk was conceived as a unifying, ennobling alternative to mass culture. The desire to divert consumer spending to proper channels saw the role of intellectual and cultural elites shift from the provision of moral guidance to the provision of expertise. Over time, entitlement to basic consumer goods and services was recognized as a right of citizenship. Crises that threatened consumer well-being (inflation, depression and war) prompted the expansion of the state's power to shape the economy.

Consumer society, this dissertation proposes, involved a particular understanding of society as well as a particular way of life. Watching Canada change through the eyes of the intellectual community, it is possible to see something new emerge, something which comes over time to be conceptualized as a consumer society. At the same time, this study presents intellectual practice as an active as well as a contemplative exercise.

By engaging with society, that is by representing, measuring, categorizing and making policies to direct the changing purchasing practices of Canadians, the intellectual community helped to shape a culture of consumption.

To Leib

... because he is always changing the story

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## Table of Contents

|                                                                                             |            |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----|
| <b>1. Introduction</b>                                                                      | <b>1</b>   |     |
| Consumer Society as Social Imaginary and Hegemony                                           |            | 3   |
| The Social Function of Intellectuals                                                        |            | 5   |
| Canada                                                                                      |            | 8   |
| Chronology                                                                                  |            | 11  |
| <b>2. Intellectuals Respond</b>                                                             | <b>17</b>  |     |
| Intellectuals                                                                               |            | 27  |
| Voices of Resistance                                                                        |            | 35  |
| The Rising Cost of Living                                                                   |            | 47  |
| <b>3. Prophets of Possibility</b>                                                           | <b>56</b>  |     |
| Theological Challenges                                                                      |            | 57  |
| The Ambiguities of Wealth                                                                   |            | 63  |
| Social Gospel as Commodity                                                                  |            | 74  |
| <b>4. The Meaning is in the Spending</b>                                                    | <b>90</b>  |     |
| The Discipline of Political Economy                                                         |            | 91  |
| Adam Shortt                                                                                 |            | 95  |
| James Mavor                                                                                 |            | 105 |
| Stephen Leacock                                                                             |            | 111 |
| O.D. Skelton                                                                                |            | 116 |
| Conclusions                                                                                 |            | 122 |
| <b>5. The Promise of a More Abundant Life:<br/>    Inflation, Consumption and the State</b> | <b>125</b> |     |
| Measuring Inflation                                                                         |            | 131 |
| The Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living                                  |            | 139 |
| The Managerial State and the Community of Canadian Consumers                                |            | 147 |
| Conclusion                                                                                  |            | 153 |
| <b>6. Culturing Canada</b>                                                                  | <b>155</b> |     |
| The Separation of Production and Consumption                                                |            | 161 |
| Making National Culture                                                                     |            | 166 |

|                                                                     |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| New Journals                                                        | 168        |
| Culture or Commodity?                                               | 175        |
| A Cultural Alternative?                                             | 179        |
| Culture as a Total Way of Life                                      | 193        |
| Conclusions                                                         | 197        |
| <b>7. Politicians, Economists and Consumers</b>                     | <b>201</b> |
| The Onset of the Depression                                         | 202        |
| Economists Consider the Causes                                      | 206        |
| Outside of the Economic Community                                   | 210        |
| Preparing for an Election                                           | 221        |
| Creating a Co-operative Commonwealth                                | 222        |
| The Liberal Response                                                | 226        |
| The Conservative Platform                                           | 229        |
| The Problem of Price Spreads                                        | 231        |
| The New Deal Speeches                                               | 235        |
| Articulating the Consumer Interest: The Commission Reports          | 238        |
| The Reconstruction Party                                            | 243        |
| The Conservative Campaign                                           | 246        |
| The Liberal Campaign                                                | 248        |
| The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation                            | 252        |
| The Arrival of Social Credit                                        | 255        |
| The Election Results                                                | 259        |
| <b>8. Society in Tension and Transformation</b>                     | <b>262</b> |
| The Socio-economic Structure                                        | 263        |
| Consuming Families                                                  | 273        |
| The Commodification of Intellectual Effort                          | 282        |
| Conclusions                                                         | 296        |
| <b>9. Controlling Consumption to Win the War and Reconstruction</b> | <b>298</b> |
| Reconstructing Canada                                               | 313        |
| Report on Social Security for Canada                                | 317        |
| The White Paper On Employment and Income                            | 323        |
| <b>10. Buying Happiness</b>                                         | <b>331</b> |
| Prelude to Consumer Society: The Post-war Transition                | 332        |
| Principles of Responsible Consumption                               | 335        |
| Models of Responsible Consumerism: From Thrift to Modest Spending   | 341        |
| The Menzies                                                         | 343        |
| The Woods                                                           | 346        |
| The Roses                                                           | 353        |

|                                                                         |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Evidence of Resistance                                                  | 362        |
| <b>11. Social Scientists, Humanists and the Question of Consumption</b> | <b>367</b> |
| The Social Sciences                                                     | 369        |
| Towards an Economics of Consumption                                     | 381        |
| The Humanities                                                          | 386        |
| <b>12. Conclusion</b>                                                   | <b>400</b> |
| Resisting Consumerism                                                   | 400        |
| Normative Understandings                                                | 403        |
| Economics                                                               | 404        |
| Canada as a Consumer Society                                            | 405        |
| The Functions of Intellectuals                                          | 405        |
| <b>Bibliography</b>                                                     | <b>408</b> |
| Journals and Magazines                                                  | 408        |
| Addresses and Proceedings                                               | 409        |
| Government Documents                                                    | 409        |
| Selected Primary Sources: Books and Pamphlets                           | 410        |
| Selected Primary Sources: Articles                                      | 417        |
| Selected Secondary Sources: Books                                       | 424        |
| Selected Secondary Sources: Articles                                    | 438        |
| Theses                                                                  | 445        |

## 1. Introduction

"The meaning is in the spending" wrote Canadian political economist Adam Shortt, discussing the significance of the acquisition of wealth just prior to the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> As Canada moved into the industrial era, Shortt, like many Canadian intellectuals, hoped that burgeoning economic growth would translate into the pursuit of higher cultural and spiritual virtues. The productivity gains of a rapidly industrializing economy were such that consumption choices rather than hard labour, they anticipated, might become the measure of society.

Western industrial societies, including Canada, were the first to describe themselves as consumer societies. Traditionally to characterize a time as dominated by consumption is to say something derogatory about that time generally and in particular about those most engaged in consuming.<sup>2</sup> Resistance to consumer values has been a persistent component of the intellectual response to modernity. Nevertheless, here, for first time, are societies that characterize themselves not just by their method of production, but also by the ability of masses of ordinary people to consume an abundance of goods and services.

This study is situated partway through the industrial world's transformation from a relatively stable society oriented towards salvation, scarcity and community to one emphasizing happiness on earth, plenty, novelty, individuality and utility, at time when these changes became the focus of considerable intellectual attention in Canada. During the period examined in this study, Canada's Gross Domestic Product grew from 9,031

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Shortt, "Some Aspects of the Social Life of Canada", *The Canadian Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 1, May 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Parr, *Domestic Goods*, p. 5.



millions of dollars in 1896 to 151,481 millions of dollars by 1963.<sup>3</sup> Despite periods of uncertainty, recession, and the Great Depression, the total economy expanded after each setback, increasing almost seventeen times in sixty-seven years. While historians estimate that GDP per capita in the decades before 1896 was growing at a compound annual rate of 1%, productivity increases saw growth after this time approaching 4%, with GDP per capita, measured in constant dollars, rising from \$1780 in 1896 to \$8002 by 1963.

As significant as these aggregate numbers were, changes in modern production methods affected not only the availability and affordability of goods but also their very nature.<sup>4</sup> The magnitude of these material changes is not always acknowledged: electric lighting transformed the experience of night; chemical colours and new materials

<sup>3</sup> GDP and GDP per capita are presented in constant 1981 dollars for ease of comparison. GDP in current market prices was \$641 in 1896 and \$46,830 in 1963. Certain figures not available for the earlier years of this study are available for subsequent decades. Total personal expenditures on consumer goods (including durable, semi-durable, non-durable and services) rose from \$6,927 million in 1927 to \$29,960 million in 1963 in current market prices. The largest rises were recorded in non-durable goods and services. Weekly hours of work declined from 55.1 in 1926 to 43.7 by 1955. (In 2006, the weekly hours of work, averaged for all industries was 31.6.) Urquhart, M. C. *Gross National Product, Canada, 1870-1926: The Derivation of Estimates*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993, Table 2; K. Norrie and D. O'ram, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), pp. 219-220, 292-293, 409; Hood, William C., and Anthony Scott. *Output, Labour and Capital in the Canadian Economy; a study prepared for Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects*. Hull: Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects, 1957, p. 25ff; Leacy, F. H. (ed), *Historical Statistics of Canada*, series F76-90, <[www40.statcan.ca/101/csta/labr81b.htm](http://www40.statcan.ca/101/csta/labr81b.htm)> For a discussion on the utility of Gross Domestic Product as a measure of economic well-being and the difficulties in calculating historic GDP numbers, see K. Norrie, D. O'ram, and J. C. H. Emery, *A History of the Canadian Economy, Third Edition* (Scarborough: Thomas Nelson, 2002), pp. xiv-xviii.

<sup>4</sup> The discussion which follows is drawn from K. Norrie and D. O'ram, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, pp. 223, 224, 273, 78; and Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.



modified material surroundings; new media of communication and transportation altered awareness of time and space; telephones, radios and phonographs affected the experience of sound. The texture, fit and number of garments an individual was likely to possess; not only where they lived, but also the number of rooms they occupied and the comforts and conveniences that surrounded them; the foods they ate, the experience of warmth and cold, practices of hygiene, the reasons one became ill, the cures that were pursued, and in many cases even the causes of death were very different in 1963 than in 1896. New technologies expanded the range of social as well as physical experiences, encouraging different patterns of association. The awareness of community was stimulated by the emergence of national brands and chain stores as well as by changes in the responsibilities of government and national art movements.

By 1963 Canadians could see, alongside lingering inequity and poverty, a society of considerable affluence living amidst an abundance of goods and services. This dissertation explores how a segment of Canadian society responded to these shifts, helping to imagine Canada as a society of consumers.

### **Consumer Society as Social Imaginary and Hegemony**

All societies consume and all societies produce. Indeed, as has often been noted, the members of any society can only consume in proportion to what they produce, regardless of whether this production is used directly, bartered, sold or becomes the basis for credit. Insofar as consumption is dependent upon production, consumer society remains bound by these limits. We are able today to consume more goods and services than at any time previously because we are able to produce more. It is also the case, therefore, that describing contemporary Canada as a consumer society refers not to a

unique or abnormal condition but to a particular pattern of emphasis. Consumerism has economic significance insofar as the production and exchange of this category of goods makes up a large and growing share of the economy. It has cultural significance insofar as the exchange, use and display of these commodities has been organized in such a way that this process of consumption gathers social weight. Our social imagination — including the ways we imagine ourselves and our relations with others, our expectations, our normative notions and images, our understanding of long term ends and the means required to achieve them—regularly involves the possession of and desire for particular goods and services. The study of consumption in these contexts— as an economic, a cultural, and a social phenomenon-- is a study of shared understandings. It is also the study of change. When we describe ourselves as a consumer society, we implicitly position ourselves with respect to an earlier lifeworld in which the use and display of commodities had less or different significance.

Consumer society, as it developed in Canada, can be usefully studied as an example of an emerging social imaginary in which the idea of surplus and the practices involved in the consumption of particular categories of material goods, came to infiltrate understandings of social order, gradually transforming concepts of identity, citizenship, sociability and morality. Consumer society, particularly as it came to be in the postwar era, also had certain affinities with hegemony, including the entrenchment of social norms that would help to sustain the socio-economic order and direct change. Intellectuals performed a wide range of functions in imagining, legitimizing and diffusing new understandings and practices.

### The Social Function of Intellectuals

The study of consumer society has often been associated with the world of goods, however this is not a study of material practices but rather one of ideas. The ideas examined here were generated by Canada's public intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> While the term is not ideal, it is useful in directing attention to the social functions performed by the nation's intellectual and cultural elites, and the instrumental nature of their contributions to building a widely held, although certainly not consensual, understanding of Canada as a society increasingly structured by the practices and values of consumerism. The texts examined here were chosen because they reveal changes, not only in the way Canadians conceived of society, but also in the kinds of influence intellectuals wielded and believed they should wield in shaping society.

Being an intellectual, it has been pointed out, is not a personal quality but a social function.<sup>6</sup> The Italian socialist theorist Antonio Gramsci postulated two roles for intellectuals within society of his day, distinguishing between conservative traditional intellectuals who, he proposed, served the interests of the established order and radical organic intellectuals who, he hoped, would act as spokesmen for the emerging working classes and for whom knowledge would have a practical, emancipatory force. It was Gramsci's contention that the subjugation of the working classes was not only a matter of

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<sup>5</sup> See Helen Small (ed.), *The Public Intellectual* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), and A. Melzer, J. Weinberger, and M. Zinman (ed.), *The Public Intellectual: Between Philosophy and Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) for recent discussions. British historian Stefan Collini suggests that the term denotes those figures who, on the basis of some recognized standing in a creative, scholarly, or other non-instrumental activity are also accorded the opportunity to address a wider audience on matters of general concern. Stefan Collini in Small, p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> In this case by Terry Eagleton, paraphrasing Gramsci in Terry Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1999), p. 1.

overt control but also of hegemony, a conditioning frame of reference that restricted the consideration of alternatives and naturalized the leadership of dominant groups. Gramsci envisaged a community of intellectuals who would reach beyond merely organizing dissent to articulate aspirations, assisting in the formation of "a new set of standards, a new psychology, new ways of feeling, thinking and living that must be specific to the working class"<sup>7</sup> in order to offset the hegemony of the ruling order.<sup>8</sup>

Others have built on these understandings, more recently emphasizing the acts of resistance that occur at the level of everyday activity where subordinate groups have persistently demonstrated their ability to resist, modify or reject meanings put forth by the dominant order. In each elaboration, however, hegemony continues to be regarded as an organizing force that entrenches asymmetrical power relations. In this context the social function of intellectuals remains bounded by Gramsci's original conception: to support or

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<sup>7</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> British cultural theorist Raymond Williams has eloquently presented Gramsci's concept of hegemony. His description, which has itself attained a certain iconic status, is worth briefly reviewing. Hegemony, as Williams explains it, is a central system of practices, meaning and values that are not merely abstract but "organized and lived," so deeply "saturating" the consciousness of a society as "to constitute the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway." Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London, Verso, 1980), pp. 37-42.

Eagleton, discussing specifically the problem of the colonial intellectual, has emphasized that the opposition between traditional and organic is highly unstable. Those who organize and articulate emerging social interests have a consolidatory as well as a critical function, while the traditional intellectuals, in their aloofness from the public arena, often have a "distance" that allows them a critical function. Whether a particular group of intellectuals performed an oppositional role as critics of the dominant trend or a facilitating role ushering in political change, Eagleton suggests, depends upon the particulars of each situation. Moreover these roles can shift over time, so that the organic intellectuals of one era become the traditional intellectuals of another, first helping to overturn the existing dominant order and then helping to entrench a new hegemony. Terry Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1999).



to expose and challenge the structures of domination. Canada's intellectual community, however, at least during the period of this study, is less easily categorized. While committed to progress, they held strong reservations about prosperity, particularly in its mass aspects.

Theories of hegemony seek to explain the social inertia that seems to forestall radical social change. An alternative theory of meaning production emphasizing the creative force of imagination in the making of the social has been proposed by Cornelius Castoriadis. In this case, the imaginary dimension is described as the "constitutive magma of meaning."<sup>9</sup> It is through the collective agency of the social imaginary that society is created and given coherence and identity, as well as the ability to recognize its own contingency and constructedness, and hence the possibility of transforming itself. The theoretical formulations intellectuals produce to explain ordinary life derive their power in part from the concrete images and the stories which these abstractions purport to explain, making possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> These abstractions are, moreover, both factual and normative. "We have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go." Ideas and material factors are not rival causal agents. Human practices are both at once.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> D. P. Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14 (1), 2002), p. 7.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and a working group of colleagues at the Centre for Transcultural Studies have developed these insights further, exploring the role of imagination in the construction of social institutions, representations and practices. See the special issue of *Public Culture* 14 (1), 2002), and Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14 (1), 2001), p. 106. Mary Poovey, "The Liberal Civil-Subject and the Social in Eighteenth-Century British Moral Philosophy," *Public Culture* 14(1), 2002), p.132.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p.



Both hegemony and the social imaginary emphasize the abstractions that mediate our understanding of society and the organizing patterns that provide social coherence. Hegemonies "saturate" daily practice from above and presume that a more true or preferred version of society is available but hidden. Social imaginary, on the other hand, is described as the "foundational condition" of social possibility that allows people to make sense of daily practice. It becomes dominant, not because it is imposed, but because more people live by it. Imaginary communities, as cultural theorist Benedict Andersen has observed, are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined: their external boundaries, internal hierarchies and the bonds between members.<sup>12</sup> The agenda for the intellectual in this case is the analysis of the process of historical formation of the concepts and categories which individuals use to imagine their collective social life as they participate in the "narrative" of their becoming.<sup>13</sup>

### Canada

Over the seventy year span of this study, Canadian intellectuals performed a variety of maneuvers that facilitated a series of cultural and moral transitions. Canadians did not stop valuing hard work, thrift, self-discipline, respectability and restraint, but rather began to see themselves and their fellow Canadians as consumers of goods and services. They did not so much abandon as modify and expand traditional values, placing new importance on self-development and self-expression, on the possibilities of the present, on personal comfort and qualities such as convenience, novelty, and the ability to

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<sup>12</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), p.15.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries" (2002), p.109.

obtain and display new purchases. Canada's intellectual community helped to bring about this shift by articulating new opportunities, normalizing new forms of being in society, establishing hierarchies among choices, containing dissent, and diffusing new understandings, expectations and moral values. Sometimes these efforts were deliberate, other times they were unintentional.

Specifically, Canadian intellectuals performed six tasks in producing the understanding of Canada as a modern consumer society. First, they helped to shift the agenda. Discussion opens the way for new understandings. Articulating alternatives, even those fundamentally opposed to mass consumerism, served to legitimize new ways of understanding society. Consideration by well-recognized authorities created social facts and helped to establish the limits of public discourse by distinguishing between what was and what was not relevant, what was and was not possible, what could be done and also what should not be done.

Secondly, intellectual practice created links that led from existing to new understandings. Initially social change, however novel, must be discussed in terms of existing categories. Over time new concepts emerge; however, the existing categories, theories and values must be modified and accommodated rather than rejected if the overall legitimacy of the social order is to be maintained. Intellectuals identified those aspects of social and economic change deemed to have the greatest impact on society and developed interpretations that, deliberately or otherwise, bridged differences between existing and emerging systems. Certain changes were deemed compatible with accepted understandings, others were rejected or marginalized. Providing linkages between traditional and new visions of society reduced the risk of radical change, preserving

traditional values as well as developing or acknowledging support for new ideas and modes of life. A degree of ambivalence is "built in" and unresolved tension becomes characteristic of Canadian consumerism.

Thirdly, intellectuals helped to normalize new ways of life by measuring, discussing, and acknowledging the pervasiveness of change. Efforts to measure change, such as the collection of new categories of statistics, including those measuring consumption, wages and changes in the cost of living, gave a sense of objective reality to new categories. Attention shifted from values to normative considerations. Representing social differences in terms of distinct patterns of consumption confirmed that all Canadians were now consumers. Creating hierarchies of consumption, in which some forms of consumption were preferred to others, helped to construct as well as to make visible, the structure of social space. Counter-pointing the mass market with notions of "higher" consumption offset tendencies inherent in the economics of mass production to the standardization of consumption.

Fourth, intellectuals helped to accommodate change, even as they protested it. Providing a "containment field" for high culture in a modernizing society helped to carry forward traditional understandings, including rather than pushing out alternatives, and to some extent, diffusing resistance. As Raymond Williams has made clear, the presence of dominant understandings does not mean the absence of dissent but only that dissent is contained and safely incorporated into the discussion of social ideals. Intellectuals marginalized and contained their own dissent, reducing the power of their critiques but also preserving "residual" values.

The fifth role of the intellectual during the period of this study was to facilitate

and control change by identifying and publicizing new social categories and practices. Intellectuals became experts in modern living, providing advice and example, and persuading Canadians of the benefits of change. New strategies of education and persuasion help to stabilize a society in which choice (political and in the marketplace) has become a dominant value.

Finally, intellectuals believed that their efforts helped to offset the totalizing tendencies of capitalism and bureaucracy. The ability to change was linked with critical self-awareness. Society, they explained, can re-imagine itself.

Each chapter examines a different key group of intellectuals wrestling with changes in everyday life and the availability of an increasing abundance of goods, which is interpreted as the emergence of consumer society. Playing multiple and sometimes contradictory roles, intellectuals helped to shape the vision of a new social form, even if they sometimes opposed it.

### **Chronology**

As the economy expanded and productivity increased, the understanding of basic needs and wants, and even more critically, of what individuals needed to flourish and thrive, also expanded, notably in ways that involved the purchase of goods and services. Shifts in the economy require the re-imagining of society. Discussion shifted from the problems of production to the possibilities of consumption. A phase of modest utopian thinking ensued that acknowledged rising levels of material abundance, the inevitability of change, and the possibility of moving society toward an ideal. Intellectuals grappled with "the notion of surplus": was it permanent, how to distribute it, how it would impact the social order, warning of the dangers associated with change as well as identifying



some progressive possibilities. As Canadians came to rely upon the marketplace for food, clothing and shelter, the ability of all the members of society to access basic goods and services became a moral and social, and then a political concern.

In Canada, one of the roles of the intellectual community has been to articulate the possibilities available to society, creating or modifying the conceptual categories used to discuss the meaning of change and introducing new themes to social discussion, including surplus, leisure, wealth and the problematic place of material goods.<sup>14</sup> New means were seen to alter possible ends. Some saw increased consumption as a problem, others as a possible solution. As they grappled with the implications of change during time of transition, Canada's intellectuals and cultural elites responded with an ambivalence that was to become characteristic of Canada's relationship to commodity consumption, committed to sets of values that, in other contexts, were regarded as mutually exclusive. Seeking stability in time of change, most were willing to accept a certain degree of tension, inconsistency and ambivalence in the way they understood society.<sup>15</sup>

In the second phase, Canada's intellectual community becomes conscious of itself and its social position under conditions of corporate capitalism. As social and economic changes made mass culture a fact in the Canadian cultural landscape, a critique emerged

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<sup>14</sup> Cultural theorist John Storey explains this process very simply, noting "Representation constructs the reality it appears only to describe." John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture* (London: Blackwell, 2003), p. x.

<sup>15</sup> An alternative interpretation, suggested in a recent study, is to see at least the Canadian Tories as selective eclectics and with an "imperfect understanding of theoretical antecedents." Inconsistencies in thought, author Philip Massolin proposes, can best be explained by regarding this group of intellectuals as myth-makers and social critics reacting to current events rather than political theorists or ideologues. Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

that served to entrench hierarchies of good and bad consumption. Canada's intellectuals sought to protect their position when change threatened their social status by defending the importance of certain patterns of distinction, championing values that were inherently at odds with the standardization of production and consumption characteristic of large scale industry and scientific management. Gramsci anticipated that one of the tasks of emerging intellectuals groups would be to co-opt the resistance of traditional intellectuals. In Canada, the intellectual community marginalized and contained its own dissent.

Intellectuals could be said to have marginalized (or accepted the marginalization of) high culture in order to preserve its status. They tried to preserve their control over select areas which they argued should be beyond the influence of the market, maintaining that some forms of consumption were preferable to others and able to convey distinction on those who selected them. Promoters of high culture as well as mass culture described private consumption choices as confirming membership in larger social grouping such as the middle class or the nation. Debating "standards versus standardization," the intellectual community began a process that both marginalized and contained high culture, a potentially obstructive force. At the same time, presenting high culture alternatives to mass culture served to entrench the understanding of all Canadians as consumers, although of different sorts of goods. Insofar as the mass consumption of standardized goods was regarded as in some ways potentially subversive of Canadian society, support for a "ladder" of consumption choices also served to create positions of distinction for those who chose the right sorts of goods.

Defining the depression as a crisis of distribution or, alternatively, as a crisis of

overproduction and underconsumption confirmed fundamental shifts in the understanding of the power and productivity of both the Canadian and the world economy. Poverty was no longer associated with the scarcity of goods but with the scarcity of means to buy goods. Social security was regarded as a problem of funding rather than kinship or community. As the face-to-face communal life of small villages and towns waned, Canadians were confronted with the need to create new mechanisms of social identification and sociability. They began to re-conceive Canadian society in an economic context of increasing productivity, in an institutional context marked by the erosion of more traditional social bonds and the appearance of corporate forms of association.

Soon a wide spectrum of politicians, policy makers and self-proclaimed experts were addressing the consumption problems of the average Canadian, now clearly understood as a buyer of goods and services. In their appeals to voters during the 1935 election, politicians emphasized the common interests Canadians shared as consumers and began to identify a role for the state in securing consumer rights. It was during this crisis and not during the expansionary phase of the economy that the notion of the Canadian citizen as a consumer began to be clearly articulated.

The lessening of the depression allowed for the renewed examination of Canadian society. Tension between income levels and expectations was identified as characteristic of the middle classes; tension between earners and spenders was identified in working class families. These strains and anxieties were highlighted but remained unresolved--in effect they come to be seen as a normal part of a consumer society. Similar tensions could be found within the intellectual community, where individuals expressed concerns

regarding their own ability and the ability of their class to maintain a position outside of the market economy, while continuing to argue that participation in the market was not in keeping with their status as intellectuals.

While the depression discussions asserted that Canadians were entitled to basic consumption, wartime policy asserted their responsibilities as citizen consumers. Those making wartime and post war plans emphasized the negative powers of consumers, particularly their penchant for irrational choices and their potential to subvert national objectives through private purchasing decisions. By comparison, the aggregate power of Canadian consumers to drive the economy was deemphasized. While American policy makers sought to increase and harness the power of American consumers, Canadian policy makers recognized that Canadian consumers had enough power to unbalance the economy but not enough to drive the economy. In the post-war period the state acknowledged the importance of consumer practices in the daily lives of Canadians, but doubted the ability of domestic consumers to significantly impact the economy. The result was a commitment by government to support but not encourage consumption, ensuring "adequate" access to basic goods while rejecting a more expansive vision of a consumer oriented society.

In spite of the modest role envisioned by policy makers, the post war years witnessed the significant expansion of domestic consumption. Intellectuals became involved with the diffusion of new understandings as authors and experts, as sociologists, political economists and policy makers, often in works addressed to average Canadians. New patterns of consumption became the subject of academic study. Lobbying for the development of high culture, the Massey Commission made clear that even when two



different versions of the nation were being imagined, both alternatives were envisioned in terms of the consumption of particular goods and services.

At the same time, studies supportive of new practices often reaffirmed traditional values, including the centrality of the family unit (now a consuming rather than a producing family), the possibility of upward social mobility (now more explicitly linked to particular patterns of consumption and the possibility that consumption decisions could alter social status), and the persistent necessity of work (because even the pursuit of leisure required wages). Rising levels of consumption, as long as each choice was carefully considered, were no longer seen to subvert the social order. The contradictions of "buying happiness" were recognized and largely disregarded, albeit with a lingering sense of guilt.

When we describe ourselves as members of a consumer society, we are referring not only to shifts in daily practices but also to changes in how they are interpreted and understood. New situations are inevitably apprehended in and through categories inherited from the past. New categories do not emerge by themselves, but are produced in the processes of considering change, as people "think[ing] with and against one another"<sup>16</sup> imagine new possibilities, gradually transforming their understanding of themselves and their society. This does not imply a uniformity of perceptions or behaviours, indeed consumer society continues to be lived as a struggle of values and understood as a conflict of interests and representations.

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, 1985), p. 4.

## 2. Intellectuals Respond

The ideal of rural self-sufficiency, with consumption dependent upon the production of one's own family, was always more myth than reality in Canada. Early on the emphasis on growing crops for export led farmers to focus on one or two dominant crops rather than mixed farming. It was assumed that families would purchase many of the basic necessities for survival. Well before Confederation material well-being was understood to depend upon a combination of earned income and home production. Active networks of commercial exchange centred around local retailers and merchants.<sup>1</sup> Credit allowed for acquisition on the basis of anticipated production or profits. Accounts were settled after goods were sold or traded, often by-passing cash all together.<sup>2</sup> Household

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<sup>1</sup> Ships were already bringing a myriad of consumer goods into Quebec by the 1760s. In one account, a single cargo included a wide variety of woollens, linen and cotton cloth, blankets and garments, shoes, hats, gloves, knives, flat-irons, Dutch stoves, weights, locks, bridal mounts, roasting spits, shoe scrapers, combs, mirrors, window panes, plates, mugs, teapots, spoons, salad bowls, garden vases, foot warmers, paper, writing plumes, pen knives, pipes, playing cards, pepper, nutmeg, cloves, cheese, salt, vinegar, dried prunes, almonds and a range of alcoholic products. These supplies were used by colonists and for trade, with natives and, illegally, with the English. Michael Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Whether credit allowed the economy to function, goods to circulate and consumption to occur in spite of shortages of coinage and capital and the seasonality of a staple-bound economy, or hopelessly indebted farmers and fishermen and retarded the development of a diversified economy, is a subject of ongoing discussion. Ommer argues that over reliance on credit, particularly in the form of "truck" contributed to the lack of cash and diminished real wages, limiting purchasing power and consumer demand. However it is also possible that the slow development of certain regions, such as the Gaspé and Newfoundland, reflected rather than entrenched the lack of opportunity in areas of limited resources. McCalla, by comparison, argues that the extension of credit permitted producers to invest in the development of farms and small businesses in advance of sales. Ultimately, Ommer acknowledges a mutuality of interests between merchants and fishermen operating in a cash-scarce economy but insists the system was vulnerable to abuse due to its inherent power imbalances, while McCalla suggests that both consumers and merchants faced choices and constraints. What is clear is that a long train of credit transactions involving various middlemen linked manufactures with the ultimate consumers long before and indeed for some time after the shift to a cash economy and the

production was the non-commercial counterpart to the staple economy: effort in both realms was critical in permitting survival on a year-round basis.<sup>3</sup>

Entering the nineteenth century, Canadians, regardless of whether they dwelt in rural, village or urban settings, were participating as sellers (usually of crops or of labour) and as buyers (of food, clothing and accommodation) in extended marketplaces linked to regional and global economies. The purchase of consumer goods was not dependent on class. Among the colonies' most educated and cultivated settlers, including the British military families settling in Upper Canada after Waterloo and the professional middle class rising in Lower Canada, the pattern and expectation of participation in a consumer economy was well established by the 1830s. When Susanna Moodie and Marguerite Duvernay came to head their households during the Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada, they turned their skills to the production of handicrafts in order to supplement family incomes. Letters to relatives and absent spouses discuss the need for cash to

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acceptance of the sovereignty of consumer choice. The cash nexus and depersonalized, institutionalized processes of exchange and credit that characterize modern consumerism must be seen as lubricants, speeding the exchange of goods, and not as casual factors. See D. McCalla, "Rural Credit and Rural Development in Upper Canada, 1790-1850" in R. Hall, W. Westfall and L. Sefton MacDowell (ed.) *Patterns of the Past* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988); Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 140-176; Rosemary Ommer (ed.) *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990). McCalla's essay is also reprinted in Ommer's volume.

While the absence of cash did not preclude the exchange of labour for goods, American historian James Livingston argues that the ability to make a "meaningful distinction" between the value of labour time and the worth of lives," and thereby to confine market forces to certain social spaces, is necessary for the development of the corporate stage of capitalism and an enabling condition for the formation of consumer culture. These distinctions were blurred by practices such as truck, in which lines between producer goods and consumer goods and between time spent on consumption rather than production, were particularly difficult to draw, contributing to the delayed recognition of the consumer's role in the economy. James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy, Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 4, 19-20, 189 n7.

<sup>3</sup> Ommer, p. 9.



purchase footwear, clothing and foodstuffs, while at the same time document an emerging market in the cities and among tourists for decorative items romanticizing the experience of settlement.<sup>4</sup> On the frontier of Upper Canada, material hardship and making-do were the norm.<sup>5</sup> Yet even here most settlers were, as one historian has aptly put it, "children of the Industrial Revolution."<sup>6</sup> Coming from England, Scotland, Ireland and America, they no longer made any but the simplest of things for themselves: factories produced their furniture, their tableware, their cooking utensils and, increasingly, their Sunday clothes. In the small towns, mid-century advertisements in the colonial press respectfully invited the public to give newly arrived goods "kind consideration."<sup>7</sup> However modestly worded, such notices served to make visible the businesses of mantua makers, milliners, and saleswomen, who advertised an "extensive and elegant" assortments of frocks and fancy goods.<sup>8</sup>

Within the household adjustment to industrialization was gradual. Well into the latter decades of the nineteenth century, however, family economies remained balanced between production for household use and production oriented to providing extra income. The opportunities for work and spending available to each family member were carefully

<sup>4</sup> Francoise Noël, *Family Life and Sociability in Upper and Lower Canada, 1780-1870: A View from Diaries and Family Correspondence* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), pp. 95, 97-98.

<sup>5</sup> Canadian historian W. Graham suggests that the grim motto of the Ontario farm kitchen, "Hunger is the best sauce," turned the absence of comfort into a statement of aesthetic principle. See W. H. Graham, *Greenbank: In the Country of the Past* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1988), pp. 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>7</sup> Russell Johnson, *Selling Themselves: The Emergence of Canadian Advertising* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 21, 35, 145; H. E. Stephenson and C. McNaught, *The Story of Advertising in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1940), pp. 10-12.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Errington, "Woman . . . Is a Very Interesting Creature": Some Women's Experiences in Early Upper Canada," in R. D. Francis and D. B. Smith, *Readings in Canadian History* (4<sup>th</sup> ed) (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 316.



calibrated against the desirability of minimizing expenses. Regardless of location, household economies continued to depend upon a combination of made, bartered and bought, even as Canada's economy continued to industrialize. Bettina Bradbury, for example, has charted the contours of daily struggles faced by working class families in the mid-nineteenth century Montreal as they strove to balance income with expenses during a time when wages had become "the necessary though seldom sufficient" basis for survival.<sup>9</sup> A different but not dissimilar situation was being faced in the farms of rural Ontario. Reliance on export markets had left domestic markets relatively underdeveloped, providing opportunities to take surplus household production, including spun wool cloth, candles, soap, butter, eggs, garden produce and fowl, to market whenever supply and demand conditions warranted.<sup>10</sup> Extra cash allowed for modest farm improvements or gradual increases in standards of living, supplementing what could be made or grown.

In the national economy, by comparison, a threshold seems to have been crossed in the mid 1890s. Debate remains as to the degree and cause of change, but after 1896 Canadian economic growth began to accelerate.<sup>11</sup> Increasing modernization of production coincided with the end of a global recession.<sup>12</sup> Steady increases in

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<sup>9</sup> Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc, 1993), p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> Marjorie Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in 19th Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> While the wheat boom was credited with accelerating the nation's development, it was in fact investment spending and not exports that lead economic growth. Waged employment in construction and the service industries was increasing relative to employment in agriculture. See K. Norrie and D. O'ram, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), pp. 224, 233-26 for a summary of this discussion.

<sup>12</sup> Overall real GNP had grown at an annual rate of 2.38 percent between 1870 and 1896, immigration was strong but so was out migration as people continued to perceive better

productivity and capital formation were accompanied by a shift from rural to urban centres, increased wage employment and increased immigration. Growth was evident throughout the nation, but cities and towns attracted three times as many newcomers as rural areas. While the percentage of manufacturing activity remained constant, the relative importance of agriculture had begun to decline and that of services (including construction and utilities) was on the rise. Despite the rapid growth of the western wheat economy, the proportion of the labour force engaged in agriculture was decreasing. In the closing decade of the century, where people spent their working hours, the sorts of tasks they were engaged in, where they lived, how they acquired food and what sorts of foods they ate, how they spent their leisure time and how they interacted with their neighbours began to change. Even as families remained poised between the exigencies of production and consumption, they were being integrated into an expanding series of nation-wide commercial and industrial networks.

The timing of Canadian capital expansion was different than the American experience. By the 1880s capital investment in the United States had entered a period of stagnation; at the same time spending on consumer goods increased more rapidly than in any other decade between 1869 and 1914.<sup>13</sup> Many American industrialists identified domestic consumers as the best source of future growth. In Canada, however, the

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opportunities elsewhere, meaning that real GNP per capita averaged a compound rate of 1.06 percent for the period. After 1896 and until the outbreak of war in 1914, these figures rose to 6.48 percent and 3.95 percent respectively. Productivity also increased during this period, from 1.1% in 1871-1891 to 2.3% in 1891 - 1911. Population increases approached thirty percent and in migration finally exceeded out migration. Norrie and Owsam, pp. 218-220.

<sup>13</sup> K. Donohue, *Freedom From Want, American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 13-14; James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994).

domestic market was seen as limited and growth continued to be associated with the development of infrastructure and the exploitation of natural resources, including agriculture, for export. The development of domestic consumer markets was not neglected, but failed to become a major focus of investment. In Canada the experience of over-competition, bankruptcy and mergers--a pattern that drove American business to embrace the economies of mass production and to cultivate domestic market growth--occurred later and at a smaller scale.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the mid and late nineteenth century small enterprises co-existed with larger manufacturers.<sup>15</sup>

As economic growth began to accelerate in the years around the turn of the century, capitalists invested in expectation of future sales and profits, but in advance of

<sup>14</sup> Skelton estimates that there was looming capacity for twice Canada's consumption in the early 1880s and milling capacity for nine hundred thousand barrels of oatmeal by 1887, when domestic oatmeal consumption was one hundred and fifty thousand barrels. Skelton noted that overproduction in certain sectors of the economy forced some manufacturers into bankruptcy and others into mergers intended to reduce costs and exert tighter control over prices. However, subsequent historians suggest that the Canadian merger movement was largely "on paper," the result of stock manipulation rather than genuine alterations in business practice. O. D. Skelton, *General Economic History of the Dominion, 1867-1912* (Toronto: The Publishers' Association of Canada Limited, 1913, pp. 187, 190. Paul Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire,' *Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> B. Forster, "Finding the Right Size: Markets and Competition in Mid- and Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario," in R. Hall, W. Westfall and L. Sefton MacDowell. There is some debate as to whether Canadian manufacturers were sufficiently aggressive in seeking out opportunities. Michael Bliss argues that Canada's manufacturing was not neglected but developed whenever opportunities for profit were present. The growth of this sector, he suggests, was not a matter of import replacement or the simple transition from household to factory manufacture, but a response to increasing local demand. Imports were expensive: settlers needed supplies; manufacturers needed tools. When Canadian makers could supply these needs more cheaply than the competition, they got the business. pp. 226-227, 245. At the same time, he acknowledges that the age of Carnegie, Rockefeller, Morgan and Ford in the United States was in Canada still the age of the general storekeepers on the prairies, sawmills in the Gatineau, shoe factories in Quebec, and textile mills and candy factories in New Brunswick. p. 287. Foreign competition and small provincial markets limited opportunity, however, few Canadian manufacturers sought out foreign markets to offset domestic weakness.



actual increases in the production of wheat or the exploitation of natural resources.

Recent work by historical economist M. C. Urquhart confirms that capital formation in this period proceeded at a significantly faster rate than population growth.<sup>16</sup> Faced with increasing competition and the high costs associated with large capital investments required by modern equipment, industrialists made efforts to modernize systems of distribution and stimulate demand. The development of marketing technique was gradual, characterized by the expansion of old methods as well as the adoption of new ideas. The scale of fairs and industrial expositions, for example, which had long been popular community events, expanded significantly, promoting new possibilities of consumption alongside new technologies and industrial techniques. Exhibitions and fairs provided the makers of consumer goods with unique opportunities to communicate with large numbers of Canadians.<sup>17</sup> These showcases of "useful efforts" were at the same time consumer experiences, offering entertainments and exposure to mass produced, branded consumer goods along side those of industry. Increasingly elaborate displays broadcast the availability and virtues of specific products. The experiences of fair-going created and legitimized new desires, helping to undermine Victorian inhibitions about spending and beyond this, to reformulate the cultural meaning of consumption.

At the same time, increases in productivity obtained by the introduction of new technologies and systems of corporate organization encouraged manufacturers to seek out new methods of publicity and distribution. Mail-order catalogues, circulars and growing

<sup>16</sup> M. C. Urquhart, "New Estimates of Gross National Product in Canada, 1870-1926: Some Implications for Canadian Development" in Stanley Engerman and Robert Gallman (ed.), *Long-Term Factors in American Economic Growth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 32, 36, 39, 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). This discussion draws particularly on pp. 120-125.



numbers of travelling sales agents provided direct links between factory and retailer, and factory and consumer. Many became involved in the direct selling of their products: meat packers, boot and shoemakers established their own chains of retail stores. The use of brands and trademarks grew hand-in-hand with the development of bottled, canned and packaged goods, and packaged goods increased.<sup>18</sup> The availability of canned, bottled and boxed foods demonstrated the new possibilities of abundance, and testified to the consistency and quantity of goods made available through mass production.<sup>19</sup> Window displays featured pyramids of products, presenting a new world of brands and packages to by-passers. The change of seasons was represented in the progression of commercial commodities from Christmas candies to summer canning supplies. Advertising expanded and advertising practices became more sophisticated, linking the satisfaction of a growing array of needs, wants and desires to the purchase and consumption of mass-produced goods. Packaging was becoming more important as shoppers grew increasingly sensitive to the way things looked.<sup>20</sup>

Retail services, including mass merchandising, began to grow rapidly.<sup>21</sup> The growth of Eaton's was illustrative of the rise of retailing in Canada and the emergence of national markets. Founder Timothy Eaton's policy of cash sales reflected the increasing availability of coins and banknotes, itself evidence of a maturing economy. The company positioned itself to take advantage of the opportunity to sell for cash, offering

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<sup>18</sup> Many of the most popular brands nation-wide were still British or American products, although Salada tea and the patent medicine "Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People" were two well known Canadian success stories. Bliss, p. 290.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Walden, "Speaking Modern: Language, Culture and Hegemony in Grocery Window Displays, 1887-1920," *Canadian Historical Review*, September 1989.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 103, 140.

goods at fixed low prices in order to effect high volumes. Cash sales and low overhead, regular advertising and a blanket guarantee of refunds on unsatisfactory goods combined to increase sales and cash flow, enabling Eaton to finance his own purchases and, increasingly, to by-pass wholesalers and buy direct from manufacturers. Through the 1880s Eaton added lines, moved to progressively larger stores, increased staff, broadened product range and added departments.<sup>22</sup>

Eaton's catalogue, introduced in 1884, and its newspaper advertisements promoted the idea of shopping as pleasure. "Everything is looked to for your comfort" customers were assured. Accumulation was encouraged: "at our prices you are able to have 2 hats otherwise you could only buy one."<sup>23</sup> By the late 1880s novelty was deemed "the order of the day."<sup>24</sup> By the mid 1890s Eaton's stores offered, in addition to a broadening selections of merchandise, cool drinks and ice cream in summer, hot meals year round, waiting rooms, parcel and coat checks, shoe repair, the opportunity to subscribe or renew magazines, and free bus service to certain boats and trains. The catalogue continued to expand in size and frequency and improve in quality. The first fashion illustrations appeared in the 1890s. The 1899 edition consisted of over 75,000 copies of 250 pages printed on heavy quality paper.<sup>25</sup> Eaton's buying power, sales volume, and distribution network gave credibility to its claim to be "Canada's Greatest Store";<sup>26</sup> however, its growth was representative of the general expansion of the

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<sup>22</sup> Joy Santink, *Timothy Eaton and the rise of his department store* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), Bliss, pp. 288-289.

<sup>23</sup> Eaton's Catalogue, 1887-1888, p. 7; 1888-1889, p. 19, cited in Santink, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> Bliss, p. 292.

Canadian consumer market in the late nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Consumption was increasing and the supply-side was becoming more efficient, both in production and marketing. Nonetheless, patterns of consumption continued to be shaped by modest incomes as well as the need and desire for goods. Middle class expenditures were gradually increasing, but working class spending remained restrained, often focused on the purchase and improvement of housing, on savings banks and life insurance policies rather than clothes, furniture or luxuries. The slow rise of wages and salaries promised strong profit margins and encouraged expansion in manufacturing and retailing, but had a dampening effect on the emergence of a mass domestic market.<sup>28</sup>

Even in this context of measured growth, Canada's intellectual community began to express fears that large-scale industrial organization and technological progress would erode traditional social patterns. Although aggregate consumer spending remained a modest component of the economy, changes in the method and organization of production in industry, agriculture and resource extraction were creating a working class that spent what it earned in wages, reshaping social behaviours.<sup>29</sup> The example of Britain and the United States suggested greater changes lay ahead. With increasing productivity, it was possible to talk of abundance in a way that was not meaningful before this time.

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<sup>27</sup> Another case in point is David Monod's discussion of changes in the Canadian diet from the 1880s to the 1920s, which notes increases in the quantities consumed as well as in quality and variety. These changes occurred in tandem with steady increases in the number of specialized food shops which doubled in Ontario between 1871 and 1891. See p. 104.

<sup>28</sup> Monod, p. 106 ff.

<sup>29</sup> As Canadian historian Doug Owsram has noted, it is difficult to talk of an industrial revolution when growth continued to rest in large degree on the export of primary resources, however, the experience of the country, especially of central Canada in the years 1898 to 1912, was seen to display the "social signature" of industrial revolution. D. Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900 - 1945*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 17.

Rising standards of living and new consumer practices became the subject of increasing and increasingly concerned commentary.

### Intellectuals

In the late nineteenth century, Canadian intellectuals still belonged to that broad descriptive category known as "men of letters." They were the nation's professors, poets and clergymen, though literate commentators from almost any profession could lay claim to the distinction. Although critical of society, their politics was seldom radical. They were interested in problems of government but were generally not employed by the state, or if so, tended to fill sinecures intended to provide incomes to the worthy rather than roles in a highly organized bureaucracy. They were generally well-educated and widely read but without the degree of specialization that would come to distinguish succeeding generations. Concerned with society as a whole, these men and (less commonly) women prepared scholarly papers, books, addresses and articles on a wide range of topics including imperialism, feminism, the role of the state, education, morality and religion.<sup>30</sup> They understood their role as one of defining and defending public values through scholarship and personal conduct alike.<sup>31</sup>

Brief descriptions of a few individuals give a sense of their commitment to the principle of well-roundedness, a trait that suited the needs and opportunities of a colonial society. Andrew Macphail was the editor of *University Magazine*, the nation's foremost conservative journal, but also an essayist, a doctor, and a soldier. George Grant was an explorer, a minister, an author, a teacher, a fundraiser and an able administrator. Adam

<sup>30</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, *The Search for an ideal: Six Canadian intellectuals and their convictions in an age of transition, 1890 - 1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 9 - 10; Eagleton, pp. 2 - 7 and 1 - 12.

<sup>31</sup> Small, p. 119.



Shortt considered the clergy, but served instead as teacher, arbitrator, civil servant, historian, and archivist. Stephen Leacock remains best known as a humorist, but was also a scholar and prolific essayist, a busy public speaker, and a department chair and a professor of political economy. His text, *Elements of Political Science*, became a standard in universities throughout North America and, as Leacock himself often liked to point out, his most profitable book.<sup>32</sup>

As these brief sketches suggest, Canada's turn of the century intellectuals were, for the most part, socially prominent and professionally successful. Working in the civil service, higher journalism, the universities, the ministry, medicine and the law, they tended to have secure and comfortable, if modest, incomes. They were professional thinkers and cultural authorities, and, although critical of society, tended to be well-connected with strong links to government and the governing classes. Confident in their values, they rejected the contemplative ideal of withdrawal and detachment and were instead vitally concerned to "make a difference," to "take a stand," and "to help society."<sup>33</sup>

In spite of differences in their political loyalties, their diagnoses of society's problems were surprisingly similar. As a group, Canadian intellectuals regarded the decades framing the turn of the century as fundamentally unstable. While rising prosperity, as measured by increases in production and wheat, were regarded as positive achievements, the benefits of increasing abundance were not unqualified. The factors which led to gains in production (the increasing scale of industrial organization,

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Leacock, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich, A Critical Edition*, D. M. R. Bentley, ed. (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 2002), p. 196.

<sup>33</sup> Melzer et al, p. 5. On the public intellectual as an engaged thinker see, in addition to the collections of essays cited above, Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

technological advances in farming, manufacturing, transportation, resource and energy development that required increasing capitalization, the importation of migrant labour) were seen as leading directly to problematic social changes: the drift from rural to urban settings, the fragmentation of the extended family, the diminishing of the relevance of traditional customs, secularization and increasing materialism.

Productivity and production were rising but the traditional social order, idealised as a close knit, orderly community of self-sufficient agriculturalists, was becoming unstable. Cash and contracts were regarded as insufficient substitutes for the ties of community solidarity rooted in necessity, proximity, kinship and community. While production had increased, the gap between rich and poor seemed to have widened. The concentration of wealth occurred in tandem with the aggregation of poverty. The slums appearing in Winnipeg, Montreal and Toronto were on a scale new to the national experience, and seeing these slums, Canada's intellectual leaders became apprehensive. Facing a floodtide of immigration, they sought to safeguard the ways of life and values they associated with the development of western civilization and the gradual but steady progress of mankind.

Even though they identified industrialization as the primary source of change, intellectuals generally remained committed to production and producerist values. Most intellectuals and indeed most Canadians continued to regard thrift, savings, hard work and initiative as the fundamental attributes of good character and economic success. Almost all agreed that increasing productivity presented opportunity as well as loss, providing advancements were directed along appropriate lines. Many intellectuals expressed the hope, for example, that increasing productivity would expand the time

available for higher pursuits. Increasingly they would identify roles for themselves in the emerging social order, often as managers of surplus and arbiters of consumption. The contemplative thinker would become the social scientist, the economist, the civil servant, or a specialized academic. Rather than obstructing the emergence of corporate capitalism, many embraced opportunities for involvement in the practical aspects of social life. As change called into question many of society's prevailing assumptions, there was an opening of possibility as well as a sense of increasing instability.

Although most members of the intellectual community expressed similar concerns regarding the changes sweeping through Canada, they understood the tension between what had been lost and what might be possible in different ways. Hungarian born sociologist Karl Mannheim has provided a useful framework for categorizing intellectuals with respect to their ideological preferences and orientation to change.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia, An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1929) (New York: Harcourt, 1936), pp. 3, 4, 40. The dichotomy between ideology and utopia identified by Mannheim (1887-1947) bears an obvious affinity with the distinction made by Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) between traditional and organic intellectuals. Both were interested in role of intellectuals in promoting or retarding social change and developed explanatory models of intellectual activity rooted in Marxist theory that distinguished between those who sought to sustain an existing conception of the world and those who sought to modify it and bring into being new modes of thought and practice. To a degree Gramsci and Mannheim can be seen as complimentary theoreticians: Gramsci argued that intellectual detachment served only the hegemony of elites while Mannheim insisted that intellectuals served all of society by remaining unattached from any one class. Both sought to "separate claims of truth from claims of power;" however, each theorist understood this process very differently. Gramsci argued that traditional intellectuals, engaged in disinterested inquiry rooted in a commitment to transcendent values, served the established order exactly by their apparent lack of dependence upon it. While traditional Marxists emphasized the coercive power of the state to enforce compliance, Gramsci emphasized the socializing power of cultural and intellectual activity, arguing that relations of domination were a lived process, diffused through the fabric of society and saturating the practices of daily life. He insisted that social progress required engaged intellectuals with the necessary conceptual and organizational skills to offset the hegemony of entrenched elites. Mannheim, on the other hand, believed that examining the social determinants of particular belief systems could

Mannheim argued that all intellectual positions were socially determined. Different intellectual groupings could be identified according to their understanding of the desirability and optimum pace of change, the nature of the social ideal and the means by which it might best be achieved, and the degree to which society could be studied scientifically. Thinking "with and against one another,"<sup>35</sup> intellectuals strove to change the surrounding world of nature and society (to bring about utopia) or attempted to maintain it in a given condition, elaborating on existing patterns of thought in order to deal more adequately with new challenges.

Using Mannheim's framework to classify Canadian intellectual discussion around

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provide "a restricted sort of objectivity" that could be the basis of a sociology of knowledge and the foundation of ethically responsible political decision-making. Marxists regarded Mannheim's theories as a betrayal of the class struggle. On some affinities between Gramsci and Mannheim see Harvey Goldman, "From Social Theory to Sociology of Knowledge and Back: Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Intellectual Knowledge Production," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 3, November 1994, p. 267; on some differences see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction*, (London: Verso, 1991) pp. 108-110, 112, 119.

While these distinctions remain relevant, it has become less common to dichotomize intellectual efforts intended to sustain and those intended to change society. Firstly, hegemony is no longer seen as "once and for all" but always in tension. The advance of time, moreover, can alter the context of class affiliation: those who appear as traditional intellectuals may themselves once have been organic. Secondly, the categories are unstable. Changes in cultural hegemony can be the result of deliberate persuasion by members of a dominant class, but also result from less articulated hopes and aspirations that seem to have little to do with the public realm of class relations. A study by T. Jackson Lears examining anti-modernist thought, for example, suggests that line between protest and accommodation can be ambiguous. Resistance can have unintended consequences that serve to pave the way for the acceptance of new values. Insofar as those who oppose change come to play a key role in advancing cultural transition, the link between intellectual effort and outcome is not always certain. These approaches remain useful as a means to categorize differences in intent if not always in outcome, and continue, moreover, to highlight the question of the intellectual's role in society. Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels*, pp. 2-3, 7, 36, 150 n7; Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London, Verso, 1980), pp. 37-42; T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p. xiii, xv-xvi, 258.

<sup>35</sup> Mannheim, p. 4.



the turn of the century suggests four groupings.<sup>36</sup> Conservative intellectuals fought the erosion of traditional order by industrial capitalism. In spite of their orientation to the past, Canada's conservative social critics did not deny the possibility of positive change. However, they envisioned change as the gradual and "natural" development of the proven standards and high ideals already present in Anglo-Canadian society. It is in contrast to this vision of acceptable progress that the rapid changes which began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were seen as undermining the conditions and values vital for social stability. In the face of rapid change, conservatives took upon themselves the obligation to recall Canadians to the values and ideals considered necessary to the much more gradual but still progressive development of civilization.

Radical religious leaders, on the other hand, called for a new social gospel, seeing in increased production an opportunity to bring the moral order of biblical Christianity into being. An abundance of goods, greater equality in the distribution of material wealth, and the application of the tools provided by the new sciences of sociology offered the means to transform Canada, reconstituting society on a Christian basis to achieve the millennial ideal in the present. Shining the light of faith and Christian values on current conditions would reveal the wrongs that society now had the ability to set right. The time to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth was at hand. While not wanting to encourage excessive consumption, social gossellers recognized that material sufficiency was the basis of personal well-being, spiritual development and social progress.

Canadian political economists recognized the destabilizing effects of modern

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<sup>36</sup> Mannheim discussed at least six different forms of political consciousness in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Hayden White reduced these to four forms for his study, *Metahistory*. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, pp. 22-29.

industry, but continued to believe that capitalism provided the best means to improve the lives of ordinary Canadians. The social surplus could be directed to educational and ameliorative programs administered by professionals for the greater good. Measured steps and fine tuning could, over time, correct the most egregious abuses. The realization of the ideal society was displaced from the present to the distant future.<sup>37</sup>

A fourth response, emerging from within the growing federal state, sought to apply the techniques of governance to society, including the collection of statistics and the creation of special commissions. Their effort to map the dimensions of the present and identify the parameters of society—to establish the facts and to stabilize and manage the present—represent an administrative or bureaucratic orientation that aimed at good government. Mannheim suggests that it is the bureaucratic rather than the conservative orientation, because it is most attuned to the here and now and less driven by the will to transform; that is truly committed to uphold the status quo.<sup>38</sup> Progress is linked to the development (the coming into being) and entrenchment of possibilities inherent in the economy of large scale capitalism.

What is striking is that each of these ideological stances involves, not only a particular orientation to historical time, but also a different proposal to reconstitute the

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<sup>37</sup> The progressive, Mannheim wrote, always experiences the present as the beginning of the future, while the conservative regards it simply as the latest stage reached by the past. The conservative insists that the past is within the present. Cited in David Kettler and Colin Loader, "Temporizing with Time Wars: Karl Mannheim and the Problem of Historical Time," *Time and Society*, 13 (2004) 2/3.

<sup>38</sup> Mannheim, pp. 118-119. As Marxist cultural theorist Georg Lukacs explained in an influential 1923 essay "Bureaucracy implies the adjustment of one's way of life, mode of work and hence of consciousness, to the general socio-economic premises of the capitalist economy." A commitment to administration is not incompatible with progress, but rather understands progress as the resolution of conflict and the management of opportunity. Luckas cited in James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism and Democracy*, pp. 20-21.

bonds of community eroded by modernity. Each group advanced its own vision of society, whether rooted in the natural bonds of community, the creed of Christian brotherhood, abstractions of the economy, or the administrative state. While all four groups are staples of Canadian intellectual history, they are seldom considered as collective responses to the problems and opportunities facing Canadian society.<sup>39</sup> Confronted with new economic and social realities, Canada's intellectual community set out a spectrum of responses that would shape the understanding of Canadian consumerism.

Listening to the these voices as they describe, complain, speculate and occasionally celebrate their times -- all the while seeking to persuade others of the rightness of their particular interpretation of the transformations underway -- it is possible to hear a new vocabulary of abundance taking shape. The consumer slowly moves onto the public stage. The notion of class as determined by one's involvement in production is supplemented by new social categories determined by patterns of consumption. Self-development and personal fulfilment were no longer solely regarded as a function of work but were becoming linked with opportunities to consume. Consumption and spending were no longer a matter of private preference but increasingly public acts with social significance. For many, consumption lost its pejorative connotations and came to be seen as a necessary basis for a full life. Even those who rejected change joined in the discussion, helping to entrench new trends. The remainder of this and the next three

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<sup>39</sup> As British cultural theorist Raymond Williams has insisted, hegemony is not monolithic. Different voices, including dissenting voices, remain part of the discussion and help shape the understanding of modernity. Indeed the grip of hegemony can be strengthened by the inclusion and subsequent marginalization and containment of dissent rather than its repression. Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, pp. 37-42.

chapters will explore these orientations and the ways Canada's intellectual community understood the shifts occurring around them. Collectively, this discussion helped to assign meaning to change, creating the categories with which Canadians thought about their relationship with material things.

### **Voices of Resistance**

Analyzing modernity by way of contrast with traditional or pre-industrial society was and is a common intellectual tactic. In Europe, social critics across the political spectrum counterpointed modern mass society with the simpler, seemingly more authentic, collectives that had immediately preceded it. Although the contrast of past and present gives the impression of a serious interest in the past, these pairings serve to establish a "pivot" to discuss the present.<sup>40</sup> German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1938), for example, described the progressive erosion of the integrated, homogeneous bonds that distinguished the *Gemeinschaft* ("community") in distinction to the self-interested impersonal ties, which he saw as characteristic of the modern *Gesellschaft* ("association"). French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) similarly contrasted the solidarity of the village where divisions of labour was minimal and values held in common, with the urban metropolis which offered greater personal independence

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<sup>40</sup> The appearance of sociology has been explained as a response to the crisis of modernity, emerging when the integration of individuals with the collective could no longer be taken for granted. The dichotomous language of nineteenth-century theory serves to illuminate a rupture between traditional and modern mass society with the intent of denoting a new conceptual awareness of the individual as separate from the group. Sociology, in effect, studies a culture that has begun to imagine itself as a society of individuals. As observers of social change, Canada's intellectuals should be understood to have formulated their concepts within this same context of modernization, regardless of whether or not they explicitly modelled their insights on the theories of classical sociology. See P. Cormack, *Sociology and Mass Culture*, Durkheim, Mills, Baudrillard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 13, 16-17 for a discussion of paired concepts in classical sociology.



and a broader range of experiences but required artificial methods of co-ordination for economic survival. While social theorists on continental Europe tended to emphasize the rise of urban mass society, those looking to Britain, including Karl Marx (1818-1883), emphasized the impact of shifts in ownership, industrialization and technological change, but similarly counter-pointed modern society with simpler, seemingly more authentic, lifeworlds that had immediately preceded it.

Although Canadian intellectuals at the turn of century certainly drew on theories that originated in the European and British experience to inform their understanding of the changes taking place around them, the fit between imported theory and local experience was not always a good one. Insofar as settlement in Canada largely coincided with the development of extended systems of market relations, the use of theoretical models that referenced the pre-industrial village as a baseline was problematic. Moreover, the ideal of progress in Canada was so strong that it mitigated against the nostalgic look backward. As an intellectual tactic, of course, the comparison of a better past and a fallen present remained useful. It was, however, the nation's conservative critics rather than the avante garde who used it, and the ideal past they referenced was not the "timeless" village, the noble savage, nor the frontier settlement but the settled order of country life rooted in agrarian self-sufficiency. Whether regarded as anti-modernists or traditionalists, Canada's loudest critics of emerging consumer behaviour were conservative, not necessarily in their political affiliations, but in their defence of ideals threatened by modernity. Equating non-participation in the marketplace with self-fulfilment, they saw the potential for contentment in the self-sufficient family unit where production and consumption existed in balance. The extreme hardships of the settlement

period were minimized and the character-building virtues of hard work in a northern climate celebrated.<sup>41</sup> Increasing abundance was regarded as a threat with the potential to undermine the work ethic and spirit of self-discipline that had made the nation strong. Agrarian society, its members bound together by necessity, religion, culture and experience, was deemed "organic" or "natural" and, by implication, timeless and God-given. Support for rural virtues was rooted, not in a vision of the pastoral, but in the perceived stability of a hierarchical social order and the strenuous character of agrarian experience. The emphasis on production over consumption remained a keynote of intellectual resistance in an age of growing affluence. Those who cleared and tilled the fields and "produce the food that feeds us" were considered the true people of Canada, as George Dennison, a leader in the Canada First Movement and staunch imperialist, frequently proclaimed.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867 - 1914* (Toronto: University of Press, 1970), pp. 129-133, 177-182.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178. The seminal work in the discussion of city and country as dialectically related ideals rather than fixed places is *The Country and The City* by Raymond Williams. Williams observed that city and country functioned as tropes rather than places in literature. They are, as he expressed it, "powerful words" around which powerful feelings have gathered. Although descriptions of the country way of life vary considerably, it is home to a virtuous, simple, and pastoral existence; in other words, to a golden age that prevailed before the arrival of the more complex, urban and fallen present. Country and city are, in effect, stand-ins for competing socially produced spaces; referencing particular relationships of capital, labour and commodities rather than real communities. Canadian conservatives can be understood to have summoned up their own version of the golden age ideal in response to the transformation of Canada from a primarily agrarian society to member of an urban, industrial empire. Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 1-12; see also G. Maclean, D. Landry and J. Ward (ed), *The Country and The City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-23. The American creation of urban fantasies about rural life, and the myth of rural virtue as a middle ground between aristocracy and savagery is explored in Laurel Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: objects and stories in the creation of an American myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001). Owrarn discusses the myth of rural virtue in the country and city debates in turn of the century Canada in *The Government Generation*, pp. 20-23.

Canadian poet Wilfred Eggleston praised the settlers who had chosen "the honest country life" apart from towns and politics and strife.<sup>43</sup> Andrew Macphail made a similar point when he upheld the merits of the farmer "who lives on his own land and owes no man anything,"<sup>44</sup> while condemning the money ethic as "the root of all evil."<sup>45</sup> Industrialization was the enemy of tradition. Machinery was "a troubler of peace"<sup>46</sup> and the steam engine denounced as "a monster of oppression."<sup>47</sup> "Getting and spending we lay waste to our powers" Wordsworth had written in response to the British industrial revolution; his sentiments were often cited by Canada's conservative critics of progress. The spread of industry, materialism, business values, increasing wealth and increasingly vulgar display were merely different aspects of the same problem. The great art of living, as Queen's University's first professor of English explained, was "to know how to have sufficiency in few things."<sup>48</sup>

Canadian historian Carl Berger insists that the call to model Canada on past ideals was not rooted in nostalgia but in a conviction that bordered on the utopian.<sup>49</sup> The appeal for an agrarian social order, hard work and discipline was not a matter of resistance to change but a call to future greatness based upon the highest standards of tradition. The Conservative mentality was not rear-ward looking but oriented to ideals seen as already immanent in Canada's institutions and the practices of daily life. Anglo-Canadian

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Cormack's analysis of classical sociology as a discourse (rather than a science) notes similar pairings, in that case of mass versus pre-industrial society. See note 38 above.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127

<sup>44</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal: Six Canadians Intellectuals and their convictions in an age of Transition, 1890-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Macphail, "The Tariff Commission," *University Magazine*, Vol. XI, Feb. 1912, p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> R. C. Wallace (ed), *Some Great Men of Queen's* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1941), p. 85.

<sup>49</sup> Berger, pp. 259-260.



society, they were convinced, already embodied the highest values and meanings of civilization. Its social structure was inherently orderly and existed in harmony with the mechanisms of the natural order which, for the time being, had been mastered.<sup>50</sup> Progress would come in the gradual and natural development of this essential nature and would lead Canada to the forefront of the modern age. The appeal to empire, Berger maintains, should be understood not as a retreat to the past but as a call to rise above the mundane.<sup>51</sup> The civilizing mission would bear rewards in Canada as well as abroad. Doing great things the Canadian people would become great. Indeed Canada's role in the empire was often seen as one of offsetting the degeneracy that followed from Britain's move away from farming and towards industrialization. "I can see," Denison told a friend in 1899, "that the day is fast approaching when the selfishness, luxury, and worship of gold above everything else in England is going to destroy the British race unless the new blood in the Colonies, will leaven the mass."<sup>52</sup> Canada's self-image was oriented toward production, and increasingly involved resupplying the homeland with food, values and people. For this reason the movement towards increasing consumption was also understood as a move away from Canada's proper role in the empire.

While the foundational insights of sociology posited a rupture between past and present, the logic of conservatism required continuity. Canada's conservative social critics often worried that life had become too easy. In the modern age, Macphail observed, "Our food supply has apparently been automatic, like water from the tap or

<sup>50</sup> See Mannheim for a useful discussion of conservative ideology. pp. 229-233.

<sup>51</sup> As Denison pointedly observed, "I can find no record in history of any nation obliterating itself; and giving up its nationality for the sake of making a few cents a dozen on its eggs, or a few cents a bushel on its grain." Only spirit and commitment, he believed, and not materialism, could inspire the sacrifices needed to achieve greatness. George T. Denison, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity*, (London, Macmillan, 1909), p. 379.

<sup>52</sup> See Berger, pp. 181, 26-261 on the theme of Britain's moral decay.



light from a wire in a city house. We have forgotten the laborious process of fetching water from the spring, or the slow degrees by which a candle is made and set alight."<sup>53</sup>

Other commentators compared the decadence of modern life with that of ancient civilizations.<sup>54</sup> George Parkin recoiled from the "fierce race for power, for wealth, for pleasure, for material surroundings" which he compared to the "Rome of the Caesars," arguing that "We must fight against the temptation to lose the great moral purposes of life in the race for gain."<sup>55</sup> These concerns crossed party lines. Pointing to the example of Greece and Rome, the Liberal-affiliated Arnold Haultain linked the decline of ancient civilizations with material excess: "It is when the mob get their *panis* free that nothing will satisfy them but *circenses*."<sup>56</sup> Man was "the outcome of the struggle for existence," Haultain argued, "the healthiest bodies and the happiest minds are those working hardest." There was a broad tendency to see rising standards of living, which they regarded as rooted in greed and uncontrolled desire, as a deviation from the social ideal. Most Canadians, they were concerned, had become complacent and inclined to dismiss or forget the rigours of a settled and productive agrarian way of life.

Business leaders celebrated the growth of industry and trade, but many intellectuals were ambivalent on the question of success, arguing that rising standards of living and urbanization undermined the physique and the focus of the nation. Self-discipline and spartan virtue, they believed, were the necessary antidotes to the

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Macphail, "The Cost of Living" in *University Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 4, December 1912, p. 51. Berger notes that affirmations of the virtues and permanence of agrarianism were being made at the very time when agriculture was in fact losing its primacy in Canada, p. 191.

<sup>54</sup> Berger, pp. 219 - 220.

<sup>55</sup> Sir George R. Parkin, n.d., cited in Berger, p. 219.

<sup>56</sup> Arnold Haultain, "Complaining of Our Tools," *Canadian Magazine*, July 1897, pp. 184-185.

corruptions of commercial luxury. Prosperity eroded the moral foundations needed for the economy to function, subverting principles of self-discipline, thrift, savings and an ethic of hard work. Abundance encouraged wasteful and dissolute behaviours. Affluence, it was feared, encouraged the private pursuit of wealth, distracting men from their public duty and eroding the requisite skills of good citizenship.

Confronted with increasing prosperity, conservative social critics called for the cultivation of character.<sup>57</sup> Thrift and industry were increasingly described, not as the means to upward mobility, but the keys to a full and satisfying life. Success lay not in the achievement of wealth, but in the building-up of moral fibre. The qualities of character were juxtaposed against the vices of a nascent consumer society, including greed,

<sup>57</sup> On the views of social conservatives see Robert Lanning, *The National Album, Collective Biography and the Formation of the Canadian Middle Class* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996), pp. 2, 85, 180-183, 187-188; Allan Smith, "The Myth of the Self-made Man in English Canada, 1850-1914," *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX, 2, 1978, pp. 202-205; and, on the views of business leaders, see Michael Bliss, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business 1883-1911* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 16-20, 30, 32. Bliss notes that he was unable to find a single reference to the straightforward goal of money making in the writings of business leaders during the period of his study. Condemnations of wealth, moreover, mounted as the economy boomed after 1906.

Robert Lanning has produced an interesting study of the collective biographies published in the final decades of the Victorian era, arguing that they promoted attributes of self-reliance, self-discipline, integrity, stability, productivity, service for others, and the ability to reach beyond class differences as the attributes of success. These collections, portraying worthy Canadians who embodied the normative values which the authors believed should be sought and internalized by all, were intended as tools for social orientation. As one compiler explained, each biography represented a model to emulate, demonstrating the traits needed for "success by example...object lessons for the present generation and examples to posterity." (Reverend William Cochrane, 1891). Insofar as progress in material development was understood to occur in tandem with moral and intellectual development, those chosen for inclusion exhibited the traits of character that were considered to contribute to the settlement and development of Canada as a nation. On the idea of the self-made man as a rejection of consumerism, albeit in an earlier era, see David Kuchta, "The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing and English Masculinity, 1688- 1830," in Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkley: University of Southern California Press, 1996).

impulsiveness and self-indulgence. The proper end of human activity was a morally sound existence, characterized by hard work, charity, and discipline.

Work had been seen in mid-Victorian culture as more than simply a means of acquiring money or social position. It was a virtue in itself, a process by which character was disciplined and man's nature developed. Labour, British essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle had written, was self-fulfilment.<sup>58</sup> Traditional intellectuals retained this faith in work and continued to regard production as the basis of western civilization. Increasing materialism and the quest for affluence were pulled men away from essential values.<sup>59</sup>

Another of the effects of increasing productivity in the context of Canadian capitalism was to widen the gap between rich and poor. Concentrations of wealth encouraged patterns of conspicuous consumption. These behaviours affronted conservative values of thrift and frugality and aggravated class tensions. Novelty and change, "excessive" and "vulgar" display and new sorts of expenditure, whether by the rich or the poor, government or church were strongly and easily condemned because the conservative critic had a firm point of reference. Mid-century life provided the yardstick to determine what was appropriate and necessary; deviations from this standard were regarded as misguided at best. New ways were associated with extravagance; definitions of the social good rooted in cash and comfort were rejected.

Those who opposed modern consumer practices were "anti-modernist" in taste as

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<sup>58</sup> Berger, pp. 221-223.

<sup>59</sup> Lears suggests there was less consensus in the conservative vision, identifying a series of tensions as one of the defining characteristics of antimodernism: engagement in practical affairs was good but commerce corrupted; self-sufficiency was valued but so was community. Conservatives, he proposes, were "half-committed" to modernization and ambivalent about material success. See T. Jackson Lears, p. 57, 98, 101. See also Bliss, pp. 134-144.



well as conviction, and found that their personal habits and preferences were increasingly out of step with the world they inhabited. Daily life brought constant affronts to sensibilities developed in an earlier age; the practices of modern consumerism were a frequent source of complaint. "In the country," one commentator observed, "everybody knew everybody else. Everyone had a recognized place in the community. In the town no one knew or cared to know his next door neighbour. In the country there was little ostentatious display of wealth . . . definite obligations attached to its possession. . . In the town the vulgar display abounds; there is much wealth and poverty. . . commercial keenness is looked upon with approval."<sup>60</sup> Another recalled that "in most places the old pier or hotel you loved in the nineties disappeared by the end of the century . . . The shop in which you used to linger, perhaps unconsciously, over old prints or buy the rarer sorts of books in is gone . . . and the spacious emporium with many departments that occupies its place hardly keeps anything that does not sell at the rate of a hundred in the season."<sup>61</sup> Campbell's tribute to the British poet and social critic Mathew Arnold captured the sense of loss and regret that conservatives increasingly felt in the face of modernity, when he sadly noted that Arnold had died "Speaking in vain, to an age, material whirled/ Too deaf to heed."<sup>62</sup> In Canada, Andrew Macphail presented an extreme example, upholding the virtues of traditional life in his personal demeanour as well as his essays by wearing suits even into the 1920s that had been cut from homespun cloth once woven by his mother. His example was not typical, but his tenacious commitment to the ideals of his youth was a physical manifestation of values other conservatives shared.

Conservatives were naturally resistant to what they regarded as the cult of the

<sup>60</sup> Mavor cited in Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal*, p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> James Cappon cited in Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal*, p. 64.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.



new, which they linked not only with the rejection of tradition but the rise of commercial value. In an article published in *Canadian Magazine* Arnold Haultain complained that the "nineteenth century seems to have brought us to the edge of a precipice."<sup>63</sup> "Fifty years hence," he observed in another essay, "the historian of the events of today will note few things more significant than our love of change--unless, indeed, that love of change will in that half century have developed in to a veritable obsession."<sup>64</sup> Change and the pursuit of novelty were linked with commercialism and the pursuit of goods, on the one hand, and the deterioration of education and public literacy on the other. "Material success is good," John George Bourinot, constitutional expert, first secretary of the Royal Society, and Clerk of the House of Commons noted, "but only as the necessary preliminary to better things."<sup>65</sup>

Bourinot wrote several studies of Canadian government and culture. Something of his attitudes can be discerned in an 1893 address to the Royal Society of Canada. He granted that there might be a place for good fiction novels, insofar as they were suited to "a busy people, and especially women distracted with household cares," but he expressed great concern that modern writing represented "the demands of the publishers to meet the requirements of a public which must have its new novel as regularly as the Scotchman must have his porridge, the Englishman his egg and toast, and the American his ice-water."<sup>66</sup> The tendency of the age, he complained, "was to become rich fast. . . . These are days of many cyclopaedias, historical summaries, scientific digests, reviews of reviews, French in a few lessons, and interests tables. All is digested and made easy. . . ."

<sup>63</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Haultain, "Complaining of Our Tools."

<sup>65</sup> John George Bourinot, *Our Intellectual Strengths and Weaknesses* (Montreal: The Royal Society of Canada, 1893), p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

The result was a "veneer of knowledge, which easily wears off in the activities of life."<sup>67</sup>

Bourinot's views were not exceptional. Canadian poet Archibald Lampman similarly objected to the influence of magazines published for the benefit of the average educated reader who "does not desire anything very original."<sup>68</sup> Demanding little, these readers received only brief efforts and short stories, with "polish but no feeling." Another poet condemned both historians and magazines that aimed for "the glittering finish," cynically recording crimes and follies rather than inspiring and encouraging mankind to emulate the best of what had gone before.<sup>69</sup> Andrew Macphail went even further, suggesting that the misery of the poor was merely a literary creation designed to increase the sales of newspapers. "Probably people never were less miserable than they are to-day" he insisted. It was middle-class busybodies, he argued, "driven by satiety in search of new emotions," who created the spectacle of suffering and the sense of discontent that was worse than actual poverty.<sup>70</sup> The true explanation for modern discontent was not poverty but plenty. "Sorrow begins when the possession of bread is sure, and leisure remains for the magnification of common ills," he wrote. Happiness was not linked to material wealth, nor was it "a perquisite of any one class."<sup>71</sup>

Conservative social critics saw themselves as public moralists and the custodians of cultural values.<sup>72</sup> Commemorating people and occasions, Wilfred Campbell, Canada's unofficial poet laureate, explained, kept alive the essential values that lay beneath passing

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> A. Lampman, June 18, 1892, cited in B. Davies (ed.), *At the Mermaid Inn: Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott in The Globe 1892-93* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> Campbell, pp. 169-170.

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Macphail, "Unto the Church" in *University Magazine*, 1913, p. 358.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>72</sup> Small, pp. 3, 119.

events. His duty was to define those values, to praise them in action and encourage readers to seek and adhere to them.<sup>73</sup> James Cappon of Queen's offered a similar interpretation: "A sense of the past is what is most needed," he explained, "a sense of the piety of things. . . . Men are humanized and made wise as they view the struggle of the race, onward, onward, through growth and decay to the uplands of the better life."<sup>74</sup> Cultivating awareness of the transience of existence was very different than the commercial search for novelty. Seeking to reinforce the principles of order which the worship of change was seen to erase.

Change forced traditionalists to articulate and defend ideals they considered largely self-evident. The articulation of the conservative position, was, in this sense, defensive and antagonistic to the trend. (Conservatism, Mannheim suggests, discovers its idea only "ex post facto," in response to the challenges presented by other groups.<sup>75</sup>) Progress was not impossible, but paradoxically required commitment to Canada's traditions. Hard work, self-discipline, and ties to family, church and community would liberate society from the crass materialism of North American society and destructive impacts of commercialism and modern industry.<sup>76</sup> In the realm of culture it required, as Mathew Arnold, the British poet and social critic favoured by so many Canadian intellectuals, had so simply stated, "acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said." Insofar as society's problems could be traced to the growing tendency to depart from these fundamentals, the task of poets and historians was to write in such a way as to reinforce the values that would safeguard against the fall into barbarism.

<sup>73</sup> Wilfred William Campbell, Laurel Boone (ed), *Wilfred William Campbell, selected poetry and essays* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1987).

<sup>74</sup> Wallace, p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> Mannheim, p. 230.

<sup>76</sup> See Berger, pp. 28-31, and Shortt, *The Search for an ideal*, pp. 171-172.

### The Rising Cost of Living

Aside from the social pressures and lifestyle changes associated with industrializing society, Canadians faced considerable increases in the cost of living, a theme that was a frequent topic of public discussion after 1909. As was often observed, no other topic so consistently galvanised public opinion. Historian Richard Hofstadter, discussing this same phenomenon in the United States, argued that rising prices and the rising public outrage directed at the escalating cost of living marked a turning point in American social history. Ultimately, he suggests, it did not matter whether the escalation in prices was the result of changes in the gold supply or the growing organisation of industry. More important than the cause was the consequence: protest against rising prices added to the strength of Progressivism and became a focus of common concern among various interest groups, especially those in urban centres "who had little else to unite them on concrete issues."<sup>77</sup> Consumer consciousness "cut across occupational and class lines, and did a great deal to dissolve the old nineteenth-century American habit of viewing political issues solely from the standpoint of the producer. In the discussion of many issues one now heard considerably less about their effects on the working class, the middle class, and the farmer, and a great deal more about 'the plain people,' 'the common man,' 'the taxpayer,' 'the ultimate consumer,' and 'the man on the street.' "<sup>78</sup>

In Canada the controversy over rising prices and the search for an explanation, or failing that, a suitable scapegoat, served less to unify public opinion than to highlight the way in which the new industrial order had advantaged or disadvantaged different groups. The newspapers cited industrialists who blamed price increases on unions and increasing

<sup>77</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 172.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.



wages. Workers blamed the rise of monopolies. Economists suggesting that increases in the world's supply of gold accounted for most of the change. Middle class intellectuals pointed to the extravagant expenditures of the wealthy and rising standards of comfort and expectation in the working classes. Everyone blamed the proliferation of middlemen involved in expanded networks of distribution and retail sales that characterized modern commerce.<sup>79</sup>

Overall, between 1896 and 1915 the inflation in store-bought goods averaged about six per cent per annum. Between 1900 and 1910 the Department of Labour estimated that the cost of food alone had risen by one-third and that the average increase in prices had been over twenty-one per cent. All Canadians were affected, but those living in the bigger centres were generally hit harder than those living in smaller communities; those on fixed incomes (a group that included professors, clergymen and government employees as well as pensioners and many wage earners) were affected more than those able to negotiate changes in their wage rates. Some of the most vocal complaints came from Canadians of moderate means, suggesting that the erosion of newly acquired comforts was more at issue than basic subsistence. Historian David Monod suggests that it was those already in "a consumerist frame of mind" who were the most vehement over the problem of rising costs.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, the problem of inflation

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<sup>79</sup> The *Canadian Annual Review* summarizes this discussion, see J. Castell Hopkins, "The Increased Cost of Living in Canada," *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (Toronto: 1910), pp. 298-304. Stephen Leacock considers the merits of different arguments in "The High Cost of Living," *Addresses delivered before the Canadian Club, Season 1913-1914*, Monday November 3, 1913. For contrasting discussions of the middleman see *Toronto Star*, "Address to Consumers," Wed., Sept. 19, 1917, p. 13 and *Saturday Night*, July 11, 1914. See also chapter four of this dissertation.

<sup>80</sup> Monod, p. 130. The Civil Servants Association, for example, was one of the earliest and most vocal proponents of indexing salaries to prices. Monod emphasizes the middle

resulted in the creation of a Royal Commission on the Cost of Living in 1913, with a mandate to examine the causes and search for solutions.

Responses to inflation provide a useful touchstone by which to compare ideological differences. Without denying the practical impact of rising costs on daily lives, the vehemence of the debate suggests that rising costs provided a focus for a range of social anxieties concerning the growth of consumerism, the commodification of modern life and the impact of these processes on social relations of gender, race and class.<sup>81</sup> For traditionalists there was no need to search for explanations as the reasons for inflation were clear and inexorably connected with larger changes in Canadian life. Pitting prudence and frugality against comfort and pleasure provided conservative social critics with an opportunity to address the moral as well as the material dimensions of modern life. Rising prices highlighted changes in consumption patterns, intensifying conflicts between older agrarian patterns that emphasized thrift, restraint, and hard work, and new patterns of consumption that involved higher standards of living, participation in the cash economy and the acceptance of new goods and experiences. Work, thrift and self-restraint remained the ideals of the conservative producer oriented discourse. New ways and new goods were condemned as extravagant. Increases in consumption were regarded with suspicion. Insofar as conservative thinkers regarded inflation as a problem driven by unrestricted desire, the solution would be found in the realm of morality rather than economics. If people regulated their personal desires, there would be enough for all;

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class origins of organized consumer protest in this period, arguing from this that the level of comfort rather than the basic ability to subsist fuelled the loudest protests.

<sup>81</sup> See Daniel Horowitz for a discussion of the responses of American conservative intellectuals to inflation in this period. Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending, Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. xxix, 70-73.

if they failed to regulate desire there would never be enough. In any case, more did not bring greater happiness.

Andrew Macphail prepared a passionate response to the problem of rising costs for *University Magazine*, examining issues in the context of epochal struggle for survival.<sup>82</sup> The cost of living, he argued, was "a reflex, or reflection, of civilization." It invariably rose with the rise of luxury and "rises fastest where luxury is most widespread." Luxury was not merely a question of matter comfort but was closely tied with the non-productive use of time and resources: "it does not matter whether that waste is perpetrated by the housemaid in the pantry, by her mistress at the milliner's, or by her employer at the club. The farmer who indulges himself with an unnecessary "buggy" pays for his indulgence with his hard won labour. The rich man who amuses himself with a motor car distributes the cost of his amusement over the whole country." Both rich man and farmer were, in their indulgences taking time away from production, as were all those "who minister to their pleasure." Meanwhile, new immigrants eschewed the traditions of self-sufficient mixed farming in order to produce crops for sale and young men left their homesteads for high wages in other places.

The dangers, as Macphail saw it, sprang from the fundamentals of the human condition: "At no time" he warned, "has there been any considerable surplus of food. When any appreciable portion of the community was withdrawn from production to become consumers and wasters . . . scarcity always followed." The solution was a "return to a reasonable simplicity of living," a return "not to making machines but to making things in themselves," and ultimately, he argued, a return to the land.

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<sup>82</sup> Andrew Macphail, "The Cost of Living" in *University Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 4, December 1912.

Writing in 1913 Macphail articulated his vision of a society divided into producers and consumers. Women, children, immigrants, city dwellers and the feeble were associated with the realm of consumption. In contrast to those who argued that women had been set free by technological innovation, Macphail asserted that they had become pathetic: performing no useful function, women were "restless", "uncontrolled," "imitative," driven by a love for the trivial accessories of life. Children had been withdrawn from production and now "consume from seven to nine years of their lives" immured within the walls of school rooms. In the cities, he complained, misguided but well-meaning enthusiasts maintained and propagated the incurably feeble. Labour as a class was also suspect insofar as the modern worker had lost his connection with the earth. Imprisoned in factories, he had become "helpless in any task but the tending of machines, too helpless to revolt, because if they revolted they would surely starve."

Technological change had seemingly ushered in an age of decline rather than progress. The invention of the steam engine had been heralded as "the dawn of a new era. . . in which human labour would be reduced and a new earth would arise with leisure and comfort for all, when men would no longer 'work,' but merely tend the machine in the intervals of caring for their souls." But the result was the factory and the slum, the mass production of shoddy goods and the proliferation of overly complex machinery, prone to break down. The shift from production to consumption, Macphail insisted, threatened the whole of society.

Agriculture, by comparison, was associated with the regenerative values of nature, self-development and the realization of divine purpose. The well maintained farm was "a world in itself," inherited from father by son and "supplying within itself all



human needs." The family farm was a source of "permanence, prosperity, and power."

The hand plough was simple, strong and efficient. The man who used it was independent, self-sufficient and free.

Macphail had begun his attack by noting that "There is, in reality, only one serious question which confronts all created beings. "What shall we eat, What shall we drink, Where withal shall we be clothed?" He ended with a prophesy, announcing "The tide has turned, the pressure is backwards . . . To-day the war is between those, on the one hand, who consume more than they produce, and those who produce more than they consume. Rising prices are a sign of the rising conflict. There can be but one ending to it." Society, he predicted, would recognize the futility of machines and factories and re-attach itself to the soil. The wage earners "in their extremity" would return to the pleasant hillsides and fertile valleys "where their fathers led the lives of free men and not the mere existence of slaves."

Macphail's essay linked the key themes of conservative thought with the shift from an agrarian, producer oriented lifeworld to an urbanized, consumption-oriented society. Calling for renewed commitment to traditional values, he and other Canadian conservatives rejected the possibility that the gains of modern industry were real. Regarding the social costs of prosperity as too high, they continued instead to champion producer oriented lifestyles and the values of plain living. Production and consumption were discussed as mutually exclusive forms of being. Placing their faith in agrarian production, they stigmatized consumers of all classes: excessive display by the newly rich, the reading habits of the middle classes, and increased spending by the working classes were equally condemned.

Heading into war, conservatives saw an opportunity for redemption and regeneration.<sup>83</sup> As Campbell explained to the Canadian Club, the coming of war had changed everything. The era had been "given over to the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, stock, mine and land gambling of the wildest nature and a craze for motor cars . . . but now the tents of gain and mirth are furled." War had "shattered our idols and woke us up to a sense of the tremendous unreality of all that had been going on." Traditions of self-denial, forethought and thrift, Campbell predicted, would replace the present hunger for gain and vulgar pleasure. The home, the family, parenthood, the country life and simple dignity of living would be revered once more. And "a new era would dawn."<sup>84</sup>

Faced with a nation diverging from their ideal, traditionalists hoped that the cataclysm of war might break through the superficial trappings of modern life and return Canadians to fundamental values. The sacrifices needed for victory were seen as an opportunity for purification and self-correction. War would be a vehicle for moral and social reform. That conservatives regarded war in this way, as a vehicle of regeneration, suggests the distance they saw society had travelled and how ingrained wrong practices had become.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> The regenerative potential of vigorous military effort as an antidote to the enfeeblements of modern life was a persistent theme in imperialist thought. See Berger for Canadian imperialists, pp. 251-257 ; see Lears for American imperialists, pp. 114-117.

<sup>84</sup> Campbell, pp. 198, 199, 202.

<sup>85</sup> Le Capra makes this point in discussing Heidegger's response to the rise of Nazism, arguing that Heidegger regarded the crisis of war as a possibility to break through to a transformed mode of being, offering a chance for the renewal of the people and the rediscovery of historical western purpose. This is not to link Canada's conservative community with the writings of Heidegger or Nazism, but to highlight a tendency among conservatives, seeing a crisis in values, to find in the crisis of war the possibility of self-correction and renewal. When a people lost touch with its inner essence, a radical rupture was required, that might open the possibility to restore society to its true path. Dominick

However, it was not to be. In the early years of war, as the community united in the face of crisis, new attention was paid to moral issues: programs of temperance, electoral reform and political reform were embraced. Political parties were dismissed as frivolous. Virtue was no longer seen as a matter of inner character but as something to be demonstrated to the community at large. The rhetoric of sacrifice and restraint was joined with a new call for service, efficiency and management.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, the practical necessities of waging war were changing Canada, increasing mechanization in both farm and factory, speeding urbanization and raising wages. Although the notion of rampant material acquisition was set aside for the duration, the dynamics of the war effort were transforming the economy and society in ways that were largely incompatible with the pre-war visions.

After the war, the conservative agenda could no longer be articulated in the same terms as in the past. Preaching simplicity and thrift, wearing homespun and Victorian black, Canada's most conservative intellectuals represented a shrinking minority, out of step, vaguely ridiculous in appearance, rigid, uncompromising and idiosyncratic rather than models of ideal behaviour.<sup>87</sup> Dismissing change as extravagance, they refused to acknowledge either the pervasiveness or the legitimacy of new household patterns. Refusing abundance, they also refused to see consumption as the possible basis for social life. New explanations and new concepts were needed, but Canadian traditionalists were unable or unwilling to respond to the challenges of modernity. While the rejection of

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La Capra. *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 143.

<sup>86</sup> J. English, *The Decline of Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> D. Hallman, "Cultivating a Love of Canada through History: Agnes Maule Machar, 1837-1927: in B. Boutilier and A. Prentice (ed.), *Creating Historical Memory, English-Canadian Women and the Work of History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), p. 31.

mass commercial experiences was shared by other intellectuals, the vehemence of conservative denunciations of material progress as decadence and rapid change as decline increasingly marginalized their position. They continued to call for a return, advocating increasingly impractical approaches to social reform while their constituency drifted away. Ultimately, they cast themselves in the role of Jeremiah (the broken-hearted prophet), prophesizing the doom that would follow from the worship of false idols.



### 3. Prophets of Possibility

As advances in industry, science and management increased production and productivity, the focus of social concern began to shift away from scarcity and towards the idea of surplus.<sup>1</sup> In a world with more goods, distribution and access to basic necessities took on a moral significance. At a time when the disparity between wealthy and working-class Canadians was widening, a cadre of young religious leaders emerged, asking of themselves and their fellow Canadians: how do we live with others in a world with more things and in which things have come to matter more?

Customarily the Protestant churches responded to inequality and social unrest by counselling self-restraint and sobriety, emphasizing the need to reform individual character rather than society. The social gospel movement did not so much dislodge these values as offer additional interpretations that began to shift the onus away from personal discipline and delayed gratification toward a new agenda of social redemption. While the social gospel movement did not endorse unlimited consumption or encourage Canadians to find happiness through buying things, it did acknowledge the importance of basic material necessities as the foundation of a moral life. In the context of increasing abundance, the ethical virtue of self-denial seemed less pertinent than the call to share. Access to basic goods and services and increased leisure time, it was asserted, would allow for the full development of the individual. These value shifts legitimized attention paid to secular well-being and detached the right to consume from producer roles, helping to create the conditions that would allow for the gradual rise to dominance of a consumer

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between a restricted economy of scarcity and a general economy of surplus is made by Georges Bataille, and is explored by Scott Cutler Shershow, "Of Sinking: Marxism and the 'General' Economy," *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2001, pp. 469, 471-472.

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### Theological Challenges

The sense of social crisis feared by Canada's conservative thinkers, was paralleled by an intellectual crisis felt with particular acuteness by many of the nation's clergymen.<sup>2</sup>

The lessons of the bible, the laws of nature and the order of society had once been perceived as a tightly woven fabric of divine purpose.<sup>3</sup> Many believed that under the

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<sup>2</sup> Were efforts to revitalize Canadian Protestantism in the late nineteenth century through the preaching of a social gospel a response to rising religious doubt or to the magnitude of the nation's social problems? Most recent histories present the social gospel movement as a reaction to the crises of modernity, linking changes in theology and religious practice to secularization and an interest in practical social reform (whether ameliorative or radical) intended to solve the problems of urban poverty. The nation's growing wealth, when addressed, is considered as a source of cultural competition rather than opportunity. Few have suggested that religiously oriented men and women also understood their efforts as a response to increases in prosperity and opportunity rather than simply as a reaction to perceived increases in poverty. Canadian historians McKillop, Cook and Marshall have emphasized that the rise of Darwinian science and historical criticism encouraged the questioning of accepted truths and fostered an atmosphere of doubt, particularly among Canada's intellectual and literate classes. A. B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), pp. 205-220; David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith, Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850 - 1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 25-48; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1985), pp. 26-40. Michael Gauvreau has challenged these interpretations. Seeing much less doubt, he suggests moreover that Darwinian science was not a focus of concern within the Canadian churches and that historical criticism was generally seen as an opportunity to substantiate rather than as a challenge to biblical narrative during this period. Clergy greeted the challenges of modernity with confidence, seeing challenge and opportunity rather than a crisis. The difference in interpretation often seems to turn on the weight given to the persistence of religion in the face of secularization. Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century, College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Westfall describes this recurrent pattern of ideas and values as a highly conservative religious "culture of order." William Westfall, *Two Worlds: the Protestant culture of nineteenth-century Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), pp. 30-36. Carl Berger discussed the same pattern in a broader intellectual and popular context in *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

scrutiny of Darwinian science, the "warp and woof" of the pattern was coming loose.

Those who regarded religion as a force for social stability as well as spiritual comfort were concerned that there were few bonds strong enough to maintain social order in a sceptical age. In *The Regenerators*, Canadian historian Ramsay Cook proposes that this religious crisis led a diverse range of Canadian intellectuals to transfer the locus of their faith from the after world to the present world.<sup>4</sup> If it was no longer possible to conceive of God as transcendent, he would be reconfigured as immanent; if the immortal soul that linked man with God was no longer a certainty, it was possible to imbue relations between men with religious significance. As the presence of the sacred realm was called into question, the boundary between the sacred and the secular began to dissolve. As a young clergyman named J. S. Woodsworth explained, the "more I think about such matters the more the distinction between sacred and secular diminishes. Theoretically, for me, there is no such distinction. It is artificial, false . . . the product of a narrow view of life."<sup>5</sup> The result for many of those who shared Woodsworth's theological concerns was not only the de-emphasis of the miraculous and supernatural aspects of Biblical accounts, but also the elevation of the secular realm.

Secularization, however, should be understood not only as a process of disenchantment and religious doubt (that is, as a process of falling away) but also as a process of falling towards greater interest in the world. Although the size and precise impact of the social gospel movement remain open to some interpretation, the decades before and after the turn of the century saw a rising wave of radical Christianity sweep

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<sup>4</sup> Cook, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 1.



through North American Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> A cadre of leaders emerged from within the Church preaching a gospel that emphasized the need for social regeneration as well as individual salvation. The church, they believed, had a duty and the ability to influence the direction of social change. In Canada these activists, initially in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches but expanding with time to include members of the Anglican and Congregationalist denominations, similarly called for the direct application of Christian principles to modern industrial society.<sup>7</sup> Social gospellers drew upon the historical figure

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Allen offers an in depth account of the social gospel movement in Canada in Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). Brian Fraser offers a useful account of the Presbyterian progressives in *The Social Uplifters* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988). Phyllis Airhart does the same for Methodism in *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism and the Methodists Tradition in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1922).

The intellectual roots and significance of the social gospel have been the subject of "vigorous and continuing debate" by historians interested in the relationship between the Church and modern Canadian society. Much of this discussion has revolved around the issue of secularization. Did the social gospel movement prolong the influence of the church by embedding religious values in the nation's legislative and culture structures, or did attention paid to social issues and the search for relevance cripple the church by shifting attention away from its sacred mission to secular concerns? Marshall tends to minimize the impact of the social gospel, casting religious efforts to accommodate modernity as assimilationist, and regards the movement as in decline after WWI. Allen acknowledges that the movement was most unified before the war, but argues that the social gospel remained a significant force in Canadian life for decades to come, particularly influencing the development of social welfare policy. J. Webster Grant offers a middle road, casting social gospellers as a transitional and essentially bourgeois group, whose primary achievement lay not in concrete reforms, but in shaping the ideology of later reform movements. Brian Clarke makes a similar argument, proposing that the contribution lay in gaining acceptance for the principle of government intervention in social reform and in shaping broader understandings of social problems. Christie and Gauvreau argue that the impact of social evangelism was widespread and ongoing until the late thirties, but that the social gospel was only one thread in more complex picture. In addition to texts already cited by Marshall, Allen, Gauvreau, and Christie and Gauvreau, see John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1988), p. 103; and Brian Clarke, "English Speaking Canada from 1854," in T. Murphy (ed), *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 324-335). The debate is reviewed in Gauvreau, pp. 182-185, 341-342.

<sup>7</sup> Cook, pp. 44-46, and Allen, pp. 4-7, discuss links between the Canadian and American



of Christ and a literal understanding of Christ's mission, urging Canadians to "walk in his footsteps." They insisted upon the possibility of creating the Kingdom of God "within time." Emphasizing Christ's teachings as those of a real historical figure shaped by the conditions and circumstances of his day, they called upon the nation to "materialize" the principles of Christian brotherhood. As Principal Grant explained to divinity students at Queen's University: "The Lord calls us to preach the Gospel to the living & to deal with its application to living issues, instead of concerning ourselves with the controversies of the past & other dead issues."<sup>8</sup>

As the social gospel attempted to come to grips with the appropriate distribution of goods, it inevitably became linked with issues of consumption and production. Provision for the soul, one minister explained, must include provision for "the temple in which the soul is enshrined; if it be worthwhile preparing man for the hereafter, it should be worthwhile making a beginning here. If the 'here' has no value, neither has the 'hereafter.'"<sup>9</sup> This shift in theological emphasis from salvation of the soul in the afterlife

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social gospel movements during their early formative years. Christie and Gauvreau emphasize the British influence, pp. 90-92. Berger discusses George Grant's American sources of inspiration in *Sense of Power*, pp. 31, 181-183. Such connections were ongoing. Several of the key speakers at the Canadian Social Service Congress of 1914, for example, were prominent members of the American social gospel movement. J. W. Grant suggests that distinctive features of the Canadian version of the social gospel emerge in the continuing emphasis on moral reform and in a "nationalistic flavour" emerging from efforts to assimilate foreign immigrants. John Webster Grant, p. 101. See also Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion, the History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 300, and Marilyn Barber, "Nativism, Nationalism and the Social Gospel: The Protestant Response to Foreign Immigrants in Western Canada, 1897-1914," in Richard Allen (ed), *The Social Gospel in Canada: Papers of the Interdisciplinary Conference on the Social Gospel in Canada, March 21-24, 1973* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> G. M. Grant, "Practical Preaching," typescript (n.d.), cited in McKillop, p. 217.

<sup>9</sup> Rev. Mackinnon, Regina, "The Church and the New Patriotism," *Addresses delivered at the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Board of

to the reconstruction of society in the present corresponded with dramatic changes in industry and society and emerging insights in the social sciences. If the path to well-being was increasingly defined in materialistic rather than spiritual terms, changes in industry were making more goods and potentially more leisure time available. When economic abundance was possible, poverty was no longer acceptable. Recognizing that they were, as one minister explained, "living in the midst of a great progressive revolution and the inescapable consequence must be the reconstruction of society on a better basis," they called for a Christian ethic that would link new economic realities with new social goals.<sup>10</sup>

The most radical ministers came to regard equality in the distribution of material wealth as the key to establishing a Kingdom of God on Earth. Relations of exchange would be based on Christian, rather than market values. The object of industry would no longer be private profit but social justice, and a more equitable distribution of goods would be an expression of the teachings and example of Jesus and restore the sense of community and brotherhood that had been ruptured by urbanization and industrialization. Even those who placed less emphasis on institutional reform asserted that links between men through God implied greater equality of condition in the world. Recognizing the reality of abundance, they began to emphasize consumption over production. Indeed the possible of fulfilment beyond work emerged as a persistent theme. "The average thoughtful man," it was observed, "feels that there is that in him which cannot be

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Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1913), p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> A. E. Smith cited in Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 23.

expressed in the mere routine of the office, or store, or factory, or shop."<sup>11</sup> Freed from necessity, man could realize his full personality. Asserting that the solution to social problems was a matter of ethics, not economics, ministers called upon Canadians to live the lessons Jesus taught.

It is, however, inaccurate to see these changes solely as the product of theological doubt or as a reaction to the social crisis of modernization. The evangelical tradition of intense personal religious experience, dramatic conversion, and the immediacy of God co-existed in Canadian life in dynamic tension with established denominations that emphasized hierarchy and authority, the taming of passions, rational religious values, and the infinite distance between God and man. Throughout the nineteenth century religious revivals swept in waves through North America. Moral crusades and social activism were central to the evangelical temper and the energies of nineteenth century revivalism became one of the driving forces of turn of the century social reform.<sup>12</sup> In the encounter between theology and modernity, clergymen were not only reacting but also built on existing patterns of worship and understandings of man's relationship with the divine.

<sup>11</sup> Reverend J. A. Macdonald, "The Businessman and the Churches," *The Empire Club of Canada Speeches, 1907-1908* (Toronto: The Empire Club of Canada, 1910), February 20, 1908, p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Allen proposes that evangelical revivals of the nineteenth century held three lessons that helped to pave the way for emerging movements of social reform: spreading the idea that radical changes in life were possible and that man could take the initiative in approaching God; spreading the idea that God was an immanent being, available to made in efforts of reformation; and establishing the role of the revivalist is effecting change. Richard Allen (ed), *The Social Gospel in Canada: Papers of the Interdisciplinary Conference on the Social Gospel in Canada, March 21-24, 1973* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), pp. 8-12. See also Phyllis Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation and Reordering Protestantism, 1897-1914," in George Rawlyk (ed), *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1990), pp. 116-119; Nancy Christie, "In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion, Popular Religion and the Challenge to the Established Order," in George Rawlyk (ed), *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, pp. 11, 25-29; William Westfall, pp. 30-33, 40-41.

Late in the nineteenth century, Canadian men and women who would become committed to the social gospel came to share in the conviction that they were living in a unique and potentially sacred moment, open to immediate transformations that would bring the Kingdom of God into being. "There are ages in which progress is imperative to life," the Reverend Herbert Symonds explained, "and it seems to me that it is in such a period that we are living . . . . We look, with different eyes, and when we look we see different things in this world of ours than our forefathers."<sup>13</sup> Proclaiming the Kingdom of God on Earth as realizable in their time, they offered the concrete possibility of a better world. As spiritual yearnings became fused with practical objectives, energy that had previously been directed towards otherworldly objectives was redirected to the attainment of religious goals in the present.

### **The Ambiguities of Wealth**

In the late nineteenth century some of the nation's leading churchmen, men who had previously regarded the spread of Christianity and material progress as fundamentally related aspects of the advance of civilization, began to see increasing prosperity as a threat to spirituality. Principal George Grant was one of those who eloquently communicated his growing ambivalence. Although he had once celebrated the nation's progress in *Ocean to Ocean* (1871) and reaffirmed his conviction that there was "faith in the heart of young Canada" and "striving upward to the light" as recently as the early 1890s, he now questioned the results. In a final address to Queen's University he asked his audience to reflect on Canada's future, "Is it to be a huge 'city of pigs,' . . . or is it to be a land of high-souled men and women?" It is "the vulgar and insolent materialism

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<sup>13</sup> Reverend Herbert Symonds, Rectory Saint Marks's Ashburnham, "Continuity and Progress," *Sunday Afternoon Addresses*, Queen's University, 1893.



of thought and life" he asserted, that "threatens the life of Canada, eating into the heart of our people. Wealth," he concluded, "may ruin but it cannot save a nation."<sup>14</sup> Grant's concerns extended to the church itself, which, he asserted, displayed "a growing tendency . . . to put its trust in external things which can always be measured by statistics instead of . . . spiritual ideas." Whether Grant's opinion had been affected by time, increasing age, or the affronts of boom time expansion, his faith in progress had been tempered by a growing pessimism.

Grant's despondency can be usefully contrasted with the optimistic tone of progressivism and inherent faith in the material abundance that lay at the heart of another call to renew the church's mission. An influential sermon by Reverend Dr. Albert Carman, usually regarded as Grant's more conservative counterpart in the Methodist Church, was equally severe in the condemnation of wealth but confident about the prospect for change. In "The Gospel of Justice," Carman bridged late Victorian progressivism and the emerging theology of the social gospel, calling upon his congregation to look beyond the "forest of church spires" and to see the "hideous wrongs, mighty injustice and cruel dishonesty" that remained in modern society.<sup>15</sup> He asked his congregation to consider:

Should the suddenly rich, the monopolists, those who have filched the savings of the people, all who live by the labour of others, meet in secret council to frame a religion under which they would like the world to live; what better could they enact but that the oppressed would bear with Christian humility their oppression, and that the wronged would live with silent lips, looking for right only beyond the grave? And yet that is in practical effect the gospel heard today in many an upholstered pew--the

<sup>14</sup> G. M. Grant, "Thanksgiving and Retrospect", *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. 9, January 1902, pp. 231 - 232.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Carman, "The Gospel of Justice," 1891, cited in Marshall, p. 68 and Cook, p. 192.

gospel of charity on the part of the rich and humble gratitude on the part of the poor--of exhortation to the rich to give, that they may evidence their goodness, and of promises to the poor of a fairer distribution of God's mercies in the future life.<sup>16</sup>

While condemning the excesses of wealth, Carman did not call for increases in charity or a return to modesty. Rather, he challenged listeners to engage in social change. Jesus, he pointed out, had brought a gospel of hope as well as salvation. It was, Carman insisted, inappropriate to counsel the poor to wait for "a fairer distribution" in the afterlife when their condition could be improved in the present. In such circumstances, charity served not to equalize class differences but to accentuate them, exalting those able to give while reducing those who received to a subservient state. Characterizing Jesus as the "champion of the poor," Carman proposed that Christ's methods be regarded as real and practical responses to injustice.

Famed Congregationalist preacher J. B. Silcox presented even stronger critique of the industrial system, condemning those who grew rich at the expense of the many. "It sometimes seems," Silcox objected, "that the laws which control the production and distribution of wealth are Pagan rather than Christian."<sup>17</sup> The monopolies that kept production down and prices up were "a direct reversal of the teaching and spirit and example of Jesus." Although the deepening gap between rich and poor was a persistent theme in Silcox's thinking, he did not object to wealth that had been earned by honest labour, legitimate enterprise and careful economy. Silcox did not call for revolution. He condemned the improvident habits of indolent workers as well as the exploitation of

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<sup>16</sup> Cook, pp. 134, 192.

<sup>17</sup> Melanie Methot, "Fame Does Not Necessarily Bring Immortality: The Reverend J. B. Silcox, A True Social Gospeller (1847-1933)," *Journal of Canadian Church History*, Vol. XLV (2003), p. 41-42.

labour by industry, noting on more than one occasion that the industrious and frugal rich deserved their wealth. In spite of his attacks on capitalism, Silcox, like Carman, received the support of wealthy parishioners.<sup>18</sup>

When addressing the place of wealth in Canadian society, Carman and Silcox expressed concerns that would become central in social gospel preaching. Firstly, they acknowledged that abundance existed in Canadian society. There was visible evidence of wealth, even if it was held in the hands of a privileged few. Secondly, there was a growing sense that inequality, far from being an example of divine order, was wrong and in fact unchristian.<sup>19</sup> Promises of a better world were made against the background of significant production increases in manufacturing and agriculture. Social gossellers were not so much against comfort as in favour of the democratization of comfort.<sup>20</sup> Wealth

<sup>18</sup> A group of rich parishioners raised funds to publish Silcox's sermons in pamphlet form. Labour also believed him to be sympathetic to their cause, asking him to address meeting of Canadian Pacific Railway strikers. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>19</sup> Grant, by comparison, denied problems of inequality, insisting the working class life had improved steadily. Of interest here is not who was correct, but the new call to intervene in and correct perceived social imbalances in the distribution of wealth. See Cook, p. 39 for Grant's view of working class life. It is difficult to determine if the sense of growing inequality was rooted in fact. New census data from 1901 makes it possible to explore patterns of income, although not of wealth distribution. While urban poverty was more visible than rural poverty, there is little evidence that disparities in industrial or factory settings were greater than those elsewhere in Canada. Indeed earnings disparities in the white collar sector were larger than those among industrial workers due to the relatively large proportion of women and young people employed in clerical, sales and service work. The census collected wages and salary data, but not information on other sources of income. Increases in wealth at the uppermost levels of society remain to be determined. See Eric Sager, "Inequality, Earnings and the Working Class," in E. Sager and P. Baskerville (eds), *Household Counts*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 346-347.

<sup>20</sup> The term is from Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, p. 124. For a discussion of the social gospel as a bourgeois movement, shrinking from class conflict, see John Webster Grant, pp. 102-103, and Brian Clarke, "English Speaking Canada from 1854," in T. Murphy (ed), *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 329-335. Semple argues that social gospel critics objected to the

was not rejected, but seen as a vehicle to hasten the coming of the Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> Not only was it possible to have possessions and be spiritual, the implication was that the poor could be uplifted if provided with a larger share of society's things.

Reinterpreting the scripture with a new attention to economic, social and political themes rooted in the historical reality of Jesus, ministers began to call for the ethics of Christian brotherhood to be "materialized" in the social order. With increasing prosperity, the prospect of a better life in the present became a real possibility. Poverty began to be described as the outcome of social relations rather than the consequences of poor character. Ministers shared with other middle class progressives the belief that the power

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dominance of the wealthy in the Methodist church, but notes that the movement itself often involved middle class ministers preaching to middle class parishioners, supported by an infrastructure of middle class professionals, all of whom could afford to be tolerant of working class needs and arguments for a greater share in the wealth of the nation because they were not personally threatened by these demands. Semple, pp. 272, 333-340, 345-355.

<sup>21</sup> Methodism continually stressed the obligation of the more fortunate to assist their poorer neighbours. A pamphlet prepared in honour of industrialist and philanthropist Hart Massey entitled "Why save money?" encouraged parishioners to use their wealth to hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God. "As rich men see their wealth in the light of eternity, catching glimpses of the divine order, surely they, too, will consecrate the usufruct of their lives for the good of others, then the Kingdom of Heaven will take tangible shape, chaos, unrest and social disorder will disappear, and this round earth will become the Kingdom of the Lord." Wealth was not incompatible with a religious mission; indeed, spending money properly was a religious act and an act of worship. Increases in temporal prosperity and spiritual progress assisted in the conversion of the world. American industrialist Andrew Carnegie argued similarly in his *Gospel of Wealth* (1900) that the wealth accumulated by rich men points to an "ideal state, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the prosperity of the many, because administered for the common good." Scott Cutler Shershow, p. 477. This understanding is also evident in an essay by Canadian political economist and progressive Adam Shortt, "In Defence of Millionaires," *Canadian Magazine*, 13 (1899), which discusses the social value of wealthy capitalists, interested, according to Shortt, not in hoarding but in spending for the benefit of the people and the development of culture. See Richard Allen, (ed), *The Social Gospel in Canada: Papers of the Interdisciplinary Conference on the Social Gospel in Canada, March 21-24, 1973*, pp. 16-17; John Webster Grant, p. 112, Semple, pp. 340, 354. Also on this theme see Reverend. J. A. Macdonald, "The Businessman and the Churches."



of science and industry had placed the present on the threshold of greatness. The vision of a more just and Christian world would provide the fulcrum needed to reform capitalism.<sup>22</sup>

The social gospel was far from homogeneous. Differences were apparent among individuals within the movement, which developed over time, and even within individuals insofar as their commitments and understandings evolved.<sup>23</sup> The development of J. S. Woodworth and Salem Bland, two of the most radical exponents, suggests how a growing awareness of what was possible could lead to increasingly radical objectives. The young Woodworth had insisted that the Kingdom of God was a "kingdom of self-control" and "a kingdom of self-denial."<sup>24</sup> A decade later lavish expenditure was still condemned and, on an individual basis austerity was regarded as a worthy goal, but ordinary working people had a moral right to a degree of comfort. Arguing that the "the economic question becomes a social question,"<sup>25</sup> Woodworth had begun to campaign for practical improvements in everyday living conditions. "An environment that permits—nay, that favours—a healthy, happy, human life, without the degrading and demoralization of private charity, that surely is the first principle of brotherhood," he asserted.<sup>26</sup> The morality of the community, he claimed, is expressed in its customs and

<sup>22</sup> The expression is from Westfall, pp. 204-205. Faced with the vision of a more just world, some would inevitably ask whether or not reality was conforming to expectation.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Allen identifies radical, progressive and conservative elements within the social gospel. The difference lay in the weight given to individual versus social salvation. Conservatives emphasized personal ethical issues and called for legislation to force compliance, seeing the salvation of the individual as the key to the salvation of society; radicals emphasized the need for social change as the basis for moral reform; while progressives sought a middle road with a board program of ameliorative social reform. Allen, *The Social Passion*, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics, A Biography of J. S. Woodworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, p. 219.

institutions.<sup>27</sup> His growing emphasis on social service for immigrants regardless of their religious affiliation (albeit with some hope of eventual conversion), gave evidence of his increasing prioritization of material conditions. By 1915, contributing a series of articles to *The Grain Growers' Guide* under the title "Sermons for the Unsatisfied," Woodsworth insisted that "in the church of the future, saving souls will, more and more, come to be understood as saving men, women and children. At least in this world, souls are always incorporated in bodies and to save a man you must save him body, soul and spirit."<sup>28</sup>

McKillop tracks a similar progression in the "radicalization of Salem Bland."<sup>29</sup>

In 1899 Bland taught that the Kingdom of God could be realized only through individual salvation and argued that knowledge of God "is not . . . minimum wage of \$1.50 a day, not free schools & free rides . . . not meat & drink, but righteousness & peace & joy in the Holy Ghost." By 1906 Bland was preaching to an interdenominational audience at Winnipeg: "the idea emphasized by Jesus was that of the kingdom, not of heaven but the Kingdom of God on earth. Christianity was not a sort of immigration society to assist us from the hurly burly of this world to heaven; it was to bring the spirit of heaven to earth." By 1918 he insisted that Christianity could no longer "be treated as a distinct realm or department of life. . . . It has no independent existence . . . if we materialise everything, including our religion. . . . the long continued and deadly divorce between the spiritual and the material will be brought to an end. Spirituality will be nowhere because it will be everywhere."<sup>30</sup> Bland rooted the possibility of a greater Christianity in equality of labour, describing brotherhood as the antithesis to capital. Insofar as the material groundwork of

<sup>27</sup> McNaught, pp. 46, 51, 60-61.

<sup>28</sup> *Grain Growers' Guide*, June 30, 1915, cited in McNaught, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> McKillop, p. 220, 221.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

civilization had already been laid, capital was no longer necessary and love could triumph.<sup>31</sup>

While Woodsworth and Bland continued on their personal journeys, many of their understandings were not exclusive to the radical exponents of the social gospel. An emphasis on everyday life and the temporal realm was consistently part of mainstream Protestantism. While opposed to any suggestion of class warfare, the wealthy middle-class lay leadership, at least within Methodism, regarded the social gospel message of faith and good works as the modern articulation of traditional evangelical concerns.<sup>32</sup> Social gospel leaders never denied the legitimacy or importance of personal regeneration. There was no rejection of spiritual religion, rather personal regeneration and social reform were both understood as necessary in the creation of a harmonious moral society.<sup>33</sup> After the turn of the century the expression of social morality was more directly linked with environmental conditions. Material things were not important in themselves but rather had value insofar as poverty was a threat to spirituality and the stability of the nation. Surroundings of the right kind (a home, decent clothing) and supplies of the right services (education, cleanliness) would have a positive moral significance. As one reverend acknowledged, "bricks and mortar do not make a home. . . .all the same a home cannot exist without some kind of house . . . The home must have what may be called a material basis . . . Without [this] . . . the home cannot exist at all, nor can it reach its

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<sup>31</sup> Salem Bland, *The New Christianity, or the Religion of the New Age* (Toronto, 1920), pp. 8-9, 17, 88.

<sup>32</sup> Semple, p. 353.

<sup>33</sup> As S.D. Chown and T. A. Moore, two leaders dedicated to a strong social mission for Methodism explained, "With the broadening of the social outlook of the people has come not a lessened, but a deeper and more compelling, conviction of the need of individual regeneration. *Ibid.*, p. 390

highest development unless this base be adequate."<sup>34</sup> In common with other movements of progressivism, social gospellers had come to believe that higher standards of living were both possible and desirable. Consumption was no longer immoral, but had come to be seen as a necessary part of the foundation of a religious life.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the leaders and secretaries of the social gospel carried these principles into the pronouncements of official church organizations and the Protestant press.<sup>35</sup> In 1906, for example, the Seventh General Conference of the Methodist Church condemned the "commercial greed and money madness" that had taken hold of society. Prices, it asserted, should be determined, not by the costs of production or the laws of supply and demand, but by the needs of working class families for a "living wage."<sup>36</sup> By 1908 the editor of *The Presbyterian* challenged that church's longstanding anti-unionism, arguing "Christian men cannot be indifferent to efforts which are directed towards improving the physical, intellectual and spiritual lot of a large portion of the community."<sup>37</sup> The chairman's address by Reverend Ellery Read to the 1913 annual meeting of the Congregationalist Church spoke to similar themes, portraying both the economically successful, who had become slaves "bound hand and foot to the great industrial concerns which they developed" and workers living in "awful and appalling poverty" as "delinquents" of the industrial order. Pointing to the "ghastly

<sup>34</sup> Reverend Sinclair, *Addresses delivered at the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>35</sup> This has been well-documented by Stewart Crysedale, *The Industrial Struggle and Protestant Ethics in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961). Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997) similarly emphasizes that it was the secretaries and personnel of the departments of social service who spearheaded the more radical thrusts of the social gospel movement. pp. 33-35.

<sup>36</sup> Crysedale, pp. 19 - 20.

<sup>37</sup> Fraser, p. 135.



and challenging contrast" between the enormous wealth possessed by the relatively few and the desperate condition of the many, Read condemned the "stubborn indisposition, the determined unwillingness of men to surrender themselves" to the spiritual ideal of life.<sup>38</sup>

The social gospel was not a movement of asceticism but a theological approach to social reform that often echoed the secular critics of excess consumption. The spiritual ideal did not require renouncing material goods altogether, but rather distributing them more equally. Determinations of injustice were linked with the belief that abundance was available. Social problems were described as the outcome of the distribution of wealth rather than fundamental conditions of scarcity.<sup>39</sup> In seeking to eliminate the boundaries between religious belief and daily life, ministers discussed the consumption of goods as the means to a full life. The development of the social gospel should be understood not only as evolution of theology and a response to the disorder or crisis of modernization, but also as a response to changing conditions of production and increases in productivity, when increasing productivity and growing surplus are seen as an opportunity for an improved standard of living for the poorest members of society. The consumption of basic necessities was increasingly seen as a matter of natural right, justified by God's immanence in the world and in all individuals, a matter of Christian ethics rather than a function of personal production.

These discussions could also be said to have illuminated the emerging logic of the

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<sup>38</sup> Crysedale, pp. 24 - 25.

<sup>39</sup> Although these discussions coincided with an inflationary period of rising costs, ministers seldom addressed this issue directly. Rising costs seem to have been viewed as another example of greed and private gain at the expense of the larger community rather than a distinct issue.

mass market by identifying a social role for goods and services, both in building a sense of community and in providing a foundation for the fulfilment of the individual. In this context the social gospel can be understood as the attempt to give religious meaning to the tremendous economic changes of the times and to direct new potentialities along religious paths. The challenge for the church, as one speaker explained to leaders gathered at the Presbyterian Pre-Assembly of 1913 was "to moralize social relationships, to create and foster a body of public opinion that shall make for the general welfare, to strive for a condition that shall make for the liberty of the vital energies of the people."<sup>40</sup> As an exhortation delivered to the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian church by Reverend Gordon makes clear, luxurious spending continued to be condemned: "You tell a Christian, not by the way he uses the Bible, but by the way he uses his bankbook; not by the way he spends his Sabbaths, but by the way he spends his money. . . . What is going to come to us? What will Canada at the close of this century be? Christian? . . . or Christian in name only, while we live in luxury and lust?"<sup>41</sup> The problem another minister explained, "was not poverty but prosperity."<sup>42</sup> American historian Kathleen Donohue argues that it was necessary to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of consumption if consumerist perspectives were to become widely accepted.<sup>43</sup> The social gospel was a critical force in making and in publicizing this difference.

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<sup>40</sup> Rev. Mackinnon, Regina, "The Church and the New Patriotism," *Addresses delivered at the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1913), p. 210.

<sup>41</sup> Rev. C. W. Gordon, Winnipeg, "The Canadian Situation," *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>42</sup> J. A. Macdonald, LLD., Toronto, "The Relation of the Church to the Social and Industrial Situation," *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>43</sup> K. Donohue, *Freedom From Want, American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

### Social Gospel as Commodity

Historian David Marshall asserts in *Secularizing the Faith* that, sometime in the late 19th century, churchmen became conscious of the fact that Canadian society had become increasingly pluralistic and secular. The church, it was now understood, faced a "competitive situation" in which newspapers, novels, theatre, films, and a host of other new leisure activities had become "rivals," contended for the time, attention and loyalties of communicants and potential congregants.<sup>44</sup> In their effort to attain "currency" in an increasingly consumption oriented society, Marshall proposes that the church adopted practices and policies that were ultimately at odds with its fundamental commitments to principles of faith: the miraculous, the transcendental and the eternal. Marshall categorizes the theological initiatives of the social gospel as one of a number of strategies undertaken to make the Christian message more relevant to the concerns of the day. Others included the adoption of new sermon topics, more colourful styles of preaching, the publication of Christian novels, and the endorsement of a range of pursuits including literary and debate clubs, organized sports, and even body-building, now loosely linked to Christian purposes, all designed to make Christianity more entertaining and accessible.

In seeking to accommodate these new expectations, ministers legitimized secular trends. Offering these services within the context of the church acknowledged people's aspirations for material well-being, granting them legitimacy comparable to that of spiritual fulfilment. By seeking religious revival through relevance, ministers demonstrated an orientation to the present which was itself symptomatic of the changes associated with the emergence of a consumer ethos. These efforts to give religion

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<sup>44</sup> Marshall, pp. 127, 128, 139.

"currency" in society, Marshall argues, implicitly acknowledged and supported changes in the relationship of church and society that gave priority to the secular over the spiritual.<sup>45</sup> The social gospel, he insists, helped to diffuse the image of people as consumers living in a society bound together, not by common faith, but by common consumption practices

Did the church, in adopting the forms of consumer culture, make itself over into a commodity? There is no doubt that ministers were willing to use whatever devices they believed would be most effective. Christie and Gauvreau offer a more sympathetic interpretation, proposing that progressive ministers embraced the up-to-date gadgetry of mass culture, including lantern-slides, stereopticon projectors and fairground displays, as opportunities to extend the influence of the church and ensure that Christianity remained within the mainstream of Canadian culture.<sup>46</sup> They argue that the strength of evangelism lay in its inventiveness and ability to use the tools at hand to reach out to people.<sup>47</sup>

To some extent the difference between these arguments is less one of evidence and outcomes than of the theoretical commitments of the historian. Marshall asserts, in effect, that the medium was the message. In adopting the forms of commerce to spread its message, the church turned that message and itself into a commodity. Christie and Gauvreau suggest that the social gospel ministers recognized that in a modern age the church's authority came not from learning but from popular consent.<sup>48</sup> The church wanted to connect with Canadians; the tools of modern communication and commerce were the most effective means available for this purpose.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>46</sup> Christie and Gauvreau, pp. 44-45.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 63.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.



These interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Certainly ministers of the social gospel willingly employed recent instruments of mass communication to place the church in the forefront rather than the rearguard of the public's attention. However, this was not simply a matter of competing for an audience being lured away by commercial alternatives (as Marshall argues), but was also evidence of the growing awareness of a new audience. The techniques ministers chose reveals something about the audience they sought to reach: literate, with disposable income and leisure time. These were Canadians with the ability to make choices, and, therefore, the ability to influence outcomes.

In their sermons, speeches and writings, ministers frequently articulated a desire to influence public opinion. The methods of communication needed to create a Christian public, however, were understood to be different than those needed to create a parish. Reading Christian novels, reading in the daily press letters to the editor prepared by ministers, reading handbills and advertisements for Christian events, and reading the brochures and textbooks prepared by the ministry, would help Canadians to become aware of the problems in their midst and their ability to effect change.<sup>49</sup> Ministers believed, not only that Canadians were consumers of media, but also that these techniques could be used to activate a sustained body of public opinion, and in this way to mobilize the political power of individuals they already understood as joined by common Christian brotherhood.

C. W. Gordon, Beatrice Bridgen and J. S. Woodsworth were three social gospellers who understood their work as an extension of evangelical tradition. Reaching beyond the membership of a single congregation or service, an even beyond the

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14(1), 2002.

institutions of the church, they identified audiences that could be engaged in new ways, recognizing the possibilities of culture to link people. The popularly priced, dramatically written best-selling novel, publicity materials and textbooks, letters to the editor, a Canadianized standard of living, and busy lecture schedules were strategies to extend the reach of the church and to mobilize the power of public opinion for personal salvation and social reform.

Gordon, writing under the persona of Ralph Connor, used the medium of the dime novel to reach out to a mass audience. He specifically aimed to introduce Christian values to single male workers living beyond the well-established moral and social norms of small town Protestantism. Although he continued to write as Connor, Gordon's identity was not a secret. Indeed, the church used his success as an author to promote religion. Gordon's books attained best-seller status in the first decade of the century, bringing him considerable fame and some fortune, but also placing him in the position of production for publication.<sup>50</sup> Whatever the effect on Gordon personally, the evidence in the voluminous fan mail he received offers testimony that his novels were effective evangelical tools.<sup>51</sup> As cultural historian Clarence Karr explains, while Gordon's fiction "did provide entertainment and, for some, escape, it was also a medium into which readers carried their personal concerns and questions in their encounters with modernity."<sup>52</sup> The 1890s were a golden age for authors in which "a mass market opened" and the concept of a best seller entrenched itself in the consciousness of the public, book-

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<sup>50</sup> Clarence Karr, *Authors and Audiences: Popular Canadians Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Karr, p. 166; Christie and Gauvreau, p. 47, Marshall, p. 141.

<sup>52</sup> Karr, pp. 35-36.

sellers and readers.<sup>53</sup> And yet, regardless of the marketing that accompanied the publication and distribution of his novels, the experience of reading often had the effect Gordon hoped for, bringing many members of his audience closer to God.

After 1915 both Methodists and Presbyterians had propaganda committees utilizing a full spectrum of modern advertising techniques to promote the Church's message.<sup>54</sup> Beatrice Bridgen, a special social service worker for the Methodist Church, travelled extensively to the small towns and villages in the Maritimes and Prairies, relying on posters to advertise her appearances. When this material failed to arrive on time or failed to be displayed, attendance and donations suffered.<sup>55</sup> Bridgen embraced the opportunities different venues provided to reach Canadians, combining entertainments with thought-provoking discussions on social issues, including themes of social purity. She built a strong following among independent farmers and local businessmen, working as well with established middle-class organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Grain Growers' Association.<sup>56</sup> "So we reach numbers in that way we could not have in the church," she once explained.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> Christie and Gauvreau, p. 43. After more than a decade of debate, the 1910 General Conference of the Methodist Church dropped restrictions listing drinking, card-playing, dancing, and the theatre attendance as forbidden activities. There was a new emphasis on "educated Christian conscience," rather than specific rules as the guide to morality. To educate the Christian conscience on public issues, the church expanded its media efforts, producing and promoting publications and sponsoring lectures. Airhart, p. 103.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49, 50.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49. Discussing a visit to Innisfail (May 1916), Bridgen noted the range of her encounters. "I am daily expected to be a walking encyclopaedia... a young man just beginning to think a long social lines, wants my opinion of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. . . a growing girl wants to know 'how to do her hair in a new and becoming style' . . . an older man would like to know if we could do away with the protective tariff and still be loyal to Britain." Beatrice Bridgen, "One Woman's Campaign for Social Purity and

J. S. Woodsworth addressed two different audiences. As the Superintendent of All People's Mission in Winnipeg, he oversaw a wide range of services developed to improve the lives of the working poor and assimilate new immigrants to Christian values and Canadian standards of living.<sup>58</sup> Woodsworth's Sunday Afternoon People's Forum lecture series included "conversational talks on helpful subjects" including architecture, the single tax, the nervous system and contagious diseases supplemented by beautiful pictures, conversation and good music, all calculated to recreate the atmosphere of the

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Social Reform" in Richard Allen (ed), *The Social Gospel in Canada: Papers of the Interdisciplinary Conference on the Social Gospel in Canada, March 21-24, 1973* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), pp. 48-49.

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the standard of living as a tool of assimilation in American progressivism see Leach, pp. 242-243. The identification of new needs can also be understood as a response to concerns over social unrest rather than simple inequality. Intervention intended to assimilate immigrants, to "Canadianize and to Christianize" strangers, show that behaviour evidence of brotherhoods same souls.

The model for most Methodist missions was the Fred Victor Mission in Toronto. Although the programs at Fred Victor were better funded and more elaborate, they exemplified the approaches that developed in other specialized city missions. As well as providing some worship services and a Sunday school, the mission held temperance, children's and mothers' meetings, ran evening classes and young people's organizations, and taught people how to grow vegetables and run a household. For the poor, it set up an employment agency, a savings bank, a free drug dispensary, an inexpensive restaurant and boarding-house, and distributed money, food, and clothing. Picnics, special suppers, and a gymnasium allowed for recreation and social interaction. The staff visited homes in the neighbourhood and prisoners in jails, and attended the juvenile courts to help young offenders. Although philosophically conservative, the Fred Victor Mission adopted the most up-to-date sociological methodology in its efforts to deal humanely with the indigent, with the expressed goal of creating moral, upright, and progressive Canadian citizens. Semple, p. 298. The Fred Victor Mission is also discussed in J. S. Woodsworth, *My Neighbour: a study of city conditions, a pleas for social service* (Toronto: Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Young People's Forward Movement, 1911), pp. 200-204. The intent was both to Christianize and to Canadianize the stranger, assimilating those regarded as foreign into the community. The degree to which this transformation involved the inculcation of appropriate behaviours, particularly of appropriate consumption choices, is suggestive of the degree to which ordinary belonging was coming to be identified with consumption. On this theme see also J. S. Woodworth, *Strangers within our gates* (1909), (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).



middle class home on Sunday evening.<sup>59</sup> In addition to his efforts to uplift and socialize working class families, Woodsworth was an accomplished publicist with articles appearing in the religious, local and national press. Even when ministering to the poor, he wrote for the middle classes preparing letters, both signed and unsigned, and waging campaigns for urban as well as social reform through investigative articles in the local press. Woodsworth averaged a hundred speeches a year between 1907 and 1913 at venues in Manitoba, across Canada and even into the United States. He was a respected producer of social surveys and textbooks for the church, combining his personal experiences with new scientific and statistical approaches to social problems.<sup>60</sup> In 1914 Woodsworth expanded on his efforts as a publicist, creating a clearing house for information on social reform, issuing weekly bulletins to the press, writing special articles for newspapers and journals across the country, establishing training courses for social workers and supervising the preparation of special publications on social conditions. "Most people," Woodsworth explained, "need a bit of a jolt to set their thinking apparatus in motion. Our task is to give the jolt."<sup>61</sup>

Classifying new techniques as efforts to remain culturally competitive, Marshall discounts these efforts to organize public opinion for the purposes of reform. Reading Christian novels and letters to editors, subscribing to Christian newsletters, attending denominational camps and congresses of social service professionals, moreover, were ways of participating religiously in new mass forms of cultural experience. These broadly shared commitments to mobilizing public opinion demonstrated, not only a new agenda,

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<sup>59</sup> J. S. Woodsworth, *My Neighbour*, pp. 208.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41, 46, 60-61, Airhart, p. 125.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

but also a new understanding of society. "Moralizing social relationships,"<sup>62</sup> it was believed, would also mobilize them. The new era involved a new way of being in society, both as an individual and as a member of a collective. The shift from individual to social salvation was also linked with an emerging awareness that society was not something pre-existing but something to be created. Individual and social salvation, the intimate and the mass experience, the sense of people as singular and simultaneously joined, paralleled the subjective experiences of consumer society.

Whether these efforts were ultimately self-defeating, easing the acceptance of values and lifeways ultimately incompatible with Christian objectives, remains moot. What is clear is that progressive ministers recognized the socializing power of consumer experiences. Insofar as the forms of commercial society, including mass consumption and mass communication, were understood to present opportunities as well as a challenges to the church, increasing material prosperity and the technologies of mass consumer society could be seen as compatible with the mission of hastening the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

In a similar way individual yearnings for transformation, aggregated into a powerful public opinion, had the potential to regenerate society by drawing the state into new areas of Canadian life. In a forward to the published proceedings of the Social Service Congress, Gordon addressed the "thoughtful men and women of the country." These Canadians, he proposed, were the ones who realized that "both civilization and Christianity are challenged by the economic, industrial and social conditions upon which the fabric of our state is erected." "In our nation," he continued, "there is so deep seated

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<sup>62</sup> Rev. Murdoch Mackinnon, Regina in "The New Patriotism", *Addresses delivered at the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, p. 207.

a sense of righteousness and brotherhood that it needs only that the light fall clear and white upon the evil to have it finally removed. . . Men and women are becoming interested in man, not in things...and this is the beginning of the coming of the Kingdom."<sup>63</sup> While it might be necessary to campaign for legislation to motivate or compel the reluctant, the key to uplifting society was the creation of an informed and enlightened public opinion.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, to the extent that the secularization arguments advanced by Marshall and others are correct, and these efforts were taken in order to make the church culturally competitive, it is not clear what alternative measures were possible.<sup>65</sup> The media of the social gospel (the novel, the press, the published social survey, advertising and propaganda), while not leading directly to consumer society, did facilitate the penetration of new material forms to new audiences. Gordon's books did extend the audience for novel reading, and in this sense increased the spread and social acceptability of commercial culture. However, maintaining the purity of traditional Christianity by offering it unchanged to Canadians seems unlikely to have been a more effective strategy in maintaining the presence of the Church in modern life.

As these examples also attest, the attention to the cultivation of public opinion corresponded with the increasing professionalization of the ministry. New projects often required specialized training and greater funding, drawing the church into bureaucratic responses characteristic of the organizational shifts in corporations and government. Large-scale professionally based gatherings like the Presbyterian Pre-Assembly Congress

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<sup>63</sup> Rev. C.W. Gordon, "Foreword," *Social Service Council*, p. vi.

<sup>64</sup> Fraser, p. 85.

<sup>65</sup> On this theme see J. Rubin, "Salvation as Self-Realization," *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 20, No. 4. December 1992.

(1913) and the Social Service Congress (1914) brought together social service professionals, ministers, journalists, politicians and representatives from various levels of government, and general attendees (but not representatives from business or industry) to address a wide range of social reform concerns. These gatherings built on the techniques and energies of the revival, but with a new emphasis on education and public awareness rather than conversion. The preparation of manifesto-like lists of improvements and the publication of proceedings after each event served both to build professional unity and raise public awareness, providing a new forum for the expression of religious values and the achievement of religious goals.

The Social Service Council Congress has been described as one of the high points of the social gospel movement in Canada.<sup>66</sup> Participants commonly referred to the Congress as a time of "awakening," noting "progress is in the air."<sup>67</sup> Consumerism was in no way a principle topic in these discussions, but an examination of the published proceedings shows themes of consumption coming into focus. The form of the congress and selection of speakers as well as the content of the addresses delivered, demonstrated a commitment to large-scale organization and expertise, as well as the principles of the

<sup>66</sup> For a full discussion of the content of the Social Service Congress see Allen, pp. 19-34.

<sup>67</sup> Controller James Simpson, Toronto, "The Extension of Social Justice," *Social Service Congress, Ottawa, 1914: Report of addresses and proceedings* (Toronto: The Social Service Council of Canada, 1914), p. 39. Richard Allen explains that, on the eve of the congress, enthusiasm, unity and accomplishment had combined to indicate that the times were uniquely open to the impress of the Kingdom of God. "Although much remained to be done, much could be done. One of the special times of God, *kairos*, was at hand." Allen, p. 18. For a useful discussion of the term *kairos* as the urge to transcend the limitations of the present in order to realize otherworldly objectives in the here and now, see K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia, An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, 1985 (1936)), pp. 212, 213, 220.



social gospel.<sup>68</sup> There was a shift from revivals to organizational efforts by professionally trained clergy, especially in the areas of religious education and social services. The acceptance of new approaches, both to personal salvation and social reform, made new demands on financing and human resources, requiring specialized training and enlarged, centralized bureaucracies and the extension of government to new areas of social and economic life.<sup>69</sup> Indeed church, state and industry were all engaged in similar patterns of restructuring during this period, entrenching not only corporate values of management and efficiency but also a commitment to rising material standards of living.

Speakers at the Social Service Congress commonly urged Canadians to see the material relations of society as the visible manifestation of spiritual belief. The industrial worker, it was often noted, could not live "a full spiritual life" in the context of uncertain employment and low wages. "Poverty and anxiety are not good for the development of our higher nature,"<sup>70</sup> explained James Simpson, a popular labour leader and speaker at the three-day event. A reasonable standard of living and a sufficient amount of free time were as much a part of the Kingdom of God as prayer. Reverend Rochester, General Secretary of the Lord's Day Alliance of Canada, reinforced these themes by associating the concept of a meaningful life, not with work, but with leisure.<sup>71</sup> Discussing "The

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<sup>68</sup> Reform objectives have been linked with the growth of church bureaucracies and the support of state involvement in society by John Webster Grant, pp. 102-103, 326ff; Rawlyk (ed), pp. 123, 125; and Semple, pp. 352-353.

<sup>69</sup> Allen (ed), *The Social Gospel in Canada*, p. 33, Clarke, p. 333-334.

<sup>70</sup> Simpson, *Social Service Council of Canada*, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> The Social Service Council, the organizing force behind the Congress, was an outgrowth the earlier alliances formed to pressure the government for legislation to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath. The clergy had advanced secular as well as religious arguments, including the usefulness of the Sabbath for general health and well-being, when lobbying for Lord's Day legislation. See for example G. M. Macdonnell, "Sunday Laws," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. V, Jan. 1898, and especially "The Relations of

Weekly Rest Day and National Well-Being," Rochester identified ceaseless toil with slavery. The Sabbath provided even the humblest worker with the opportunity to announce, "I am no longer an employee, a servant much less a slave, I am a man!" The "mere interruption of labour" had "a distinctly elevating influence upon the mind and spirit."<sup>72</sup> A day of leisure allowed for family time, self-improvement through cultural pursuits including reading and meditation, and the opportunity to develop "all that is highest and best." Toil was not the basis of a good life but its antithesis.

In one of the major addresses delivered at the Congress, Reverend C. W. Gordon condemned the presence of poverty in the midst of luxury as "a crime against Brotherhood." Neither the state nor the church, he complained, had adequately considered the needs of the common man.<sup>73</sup> If people followed the example of Christ, realizing that they were all "by virtue of their relation to God" bound to one another, they would as a matter of course take the necessary steps to end poverty by redistributing wealth. When righteousness, peace and gladness prevailed, production and property would be unimportant. The thing of highest value "would be man himself," and religion and brotherhood would be "synonymous terms." Shifting attention from the production and ownership of goods to those who used them would free Canadians from the

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Legislation and Morality," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. VII, April 1900. The quest for protective legislation of the Sabbath is in itself often cited as evidence of the church's diminishing institutional and moral authority. See Marshall, pp. 132-138 and John Webster Grant, pp. 326 ff for discussions of Sabbath legislation as evidence of secularization. Even with the successful passage of the Lord's Day Act in 1907, declines in traditional Sabbath observance continued to be a concern for the church.

<sup>72</sup> Rev. W. M. Rochester, General Secretary of the Lord's Day Alliance of Canada, "The Weekly Rest Day and National Well-Being," *Social Service Council of Canada*, pp. 17 - 24.

<sup>73</sup> Rev. C. W. Gordon, "The New State and the New Church," *Social Service Council of Canada*, p. 192.

oppression of necessity.<sup>74</sup>

In these addresses and many others, material concerns were a central theme, even by speakers who hoped to move people beyond materialism. Although excessive materialism was condemned, a full life was seen to involve an increasingly complex set of needs, including a home, a garden, and time for self-improvement.<sup>75</sup> This is not to assert that these ministers overvalued the material or had lost interest in individual salvation, but to note that making material conditions a key component in a social gospel did have the affect of shifting attention away from purely spiritual topics and toward secular understandings of a good life. The religious understanding of a better society and better social relations was linked with the distribution of goods and services. Hard work and poverty were no longer regarded as good for the soul.

At the same time, however, few questioned the importance of behavioural restraints such as sobriety, self-discipline and thrift. Consumerist themes were an extension of, but certainly not a replacement for, older themes. Most addresses to the 1914 Social Service Council Congress, for example, even those given by radical speakers, made favourable reference to industry. The Reverend J. W. Aikens of

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<sup>74</sup> Poverty can be seen as the counterpart to wealth in as much as it comes to be defined as the territory of unfilled needs. The identification of these needs authorizes new forms of intervention whose objective is not simply the elimination of inequality but more specifically the elimination of difference. The social threat represented by poverty is not simple acts of violence but the violation of community standards. Participation in property, in organized society, and in political life also serves to integrate the poor into the social order and, more importantly, into the defence of that order. Giovanna Procacci, "Social economy and the government of poverty," in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (ed), *The Foucault Effect, Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>75</sup> Capitalist production, according to Marx, requires investments of ever-greater value, a corresponding expansion of material consumption, and hence, also, "the cultivation of all the qualities of the social human being. . . in a form as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations." Cited in Scott Cutler Shershow, p. 485.

Metropolitan Methodist Church of Toronto was invited to address the topic of "Jesus Christ and Industry."<sup>76</sup> The "first object" of the corporation, Aikens emphasized, was "to manufacture citizens" for the coming Kingdom of Christ. Citing the example of England's Cadbury Cocoa organization, he explained that the company provided every employee with a home, complete with garden and flowers, and playgrounds and libraries for the community. Conflating sacred and secular, he presented improved material conditions of the working class family as the moral equivalent of religious worship. "Man is more than an economic factor," Aikens insisted, "his moral and spiritual faculties must enter into the solution of industrial problems." The production of Cadbury's Cocoa was "but a by-product of the works." A "proper valuation of the individual" would lead to a more equitable distribution of natural resources. If society could measure the true worth of a child, the existence of slums and child labour would end. Aikens added that industry and the Church had much to learn from each other. The church's emphasis on the moral and spiritual faculties should enter into the solution of industrial problems; meanwhile, the Church could learn to conduct its operations with greater efficiency. At least for rhetorical purposes, Aikens assigned morality and efficiency an equivalent value.

Many ministers (and many Canadians) regarded the rise of large factories and cities, of corporations, labour unions, railroad and newspaper networks as tools that would reconstruct the social order, creating collective organizations that embodied the principles of brotherhood. The more radical ministers believed, like Aikens, that the application of Christian principles to industry would secure a more equitable distribution of the wealth being created, abolishing poverty and improving relations between men.

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<sup>76</sup> Rev. J. W. Aikens, Pastor of the Metropolitan Methodist Church of Toronto, "Jesus Christ and Industry," *Social Service Council of Canada*, pp. 42-45.



For this reason, it was often observed that industrial life was "preparing the conditions" for the Kingdom of God,<sup>77</sup> or as another speaker explained, "it is very evident . . . that God intends to use industrial life to bring His Kingdom on earth."<sup>78</sup> Even Salem Bland, a minister customarily associated with socialism, asserted that religious fellowship was "to be found in the process of industry and commerce." Co-operation in commerce and industry, he insisted, "is the real Holy Communion."<sup>79</sup>

This high regard for industry seems inconsistent in the context of frequent condemnations of labour exploitation, but for several reasons was not. Firstly, progressive ministers made a distinction between the potential of the industrial system and its specific manifestation in a world subject to greed. Secondly, their respect for large-scale organization, efficiency, and orderly management reveals something of the challenges they faced as professionals. The social gospel did not so much reject production as shift the focus of attention from the economic to the moral implications of large-scale industry, orienting the discussion to the possibilities increased production represented for the advance of society and the individual. Redistributing wealth did not preclude increasing it. The shift from a producerist to a consumerist framework represented, not the overthrow, but the progressive perfection of Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

The place of consumption in the message of the social gospel should not be overstated. Early on rising levels of abundance informed the thinking of social gossellers. Over time consumer concerns moved from the background to the foreground of discussion, becoming one of the key things they thought about. However, material

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<sup>77</sup> *Social Service Council of Canada*, pp. 24, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Allen, *The Social Passion*, p. 24.

<sup>79</sup> McKillop, p. 222.

<sup>80</sup> Fraser, p. 177.

relations were only one of a number of concerns, and thinking about consumption was very tangled up with other issues. When ministers addressed consumption directly, it was often idealized as an antidote to social unrest. In the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth everyone would have enough. There would be sufficient leisure time for self-development and worship. The brotherhood of man would be expressed through greater material equality. The negative connotations of consumption were reduced and replaced with more positive understandings. As part of their preparation for the dawning of a new age, social gossellers imbued material relations with moral significance, assigning religious value to increasing productivity and the forms of social organization associated with modern industry. Utopian possibility was infused into the discussion of modern material relations when the Church used its social authority to insist that goods had the potential to reconstruct social relations and to provide a basis for individual spiritual fulfilment. Insisting that all people had a natural right to material well being, regardless of their role in production, ministers advanced consumerist values into the mainstream of public discussion.

As long as consumption was considered immoral, it would be impossible to champion an economic order dedicated to increasing consumption. Social gossellers, whether conservative or radical, hardly sought to justify consumption as such. However, they did help to shift the focus of discussion from the consumption of luxury goods to daily needs. Distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable practices helped to legitimize the idea of the consumer. By identifying consumption as a field where social relations play out and could be reformed, the social gospel contributed to the creation of a climate of opinion favourable to new practices and new values.

#### 4. The Meaning is in the Spending

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, a growing awareness of economic surplus called into question economic theories developed in an environment of scarcity. New means were seen to alter possible ends. A phase of modest utopian thinking ensued that saw many intellectuals acknowledge rising levels of material abundance and the possibility of moving society toward a more ideal state, in which democracy took social as well as political form. The economic potential of rising levels of domestic consumption, generally acknowledged by American and British thinkers, was less apparent in Canada where consumer goods were often imported and where industrial production was not as far advanced. Perceiving a domestic market of limited size, Canada's political economists envisaged a country rich in resources but poor in population and therefore ample, but constrained, opportunities for growth. Canada's political economists did not, for the most part, express interest in what American historian Kathleen Donohue has called "consumptionist" understandings which emphasized the power of aggregate consumer spending to drive the economy.<sup>1</sup> Instead, growth continued to be associated with capital investment and the potential to expand external trade.

While eager for prosperity, Canada's political economists remained ambivalent about the increasing emphasis Canadians seemed to be placing on the acquisition of material goods. As intellectuals they regarded the excesses of conspicuous spending with dismay, even though as economists they regarded desire as a spur to individual initiative and social progress. In a similar way, they saw productivity gains as critical to economic

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<sup>1</sup> K. Donohue, *Freedom From Want, American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 4-7.

growth, while regarding participation in large-scale industrial enterprise as de-humanizing to labour.

Grappling with the notion of economic surplus but unwilling to endorse a consumer driven economy, they rejected mass consumption as a means to economic growth. With total wealth increasing, imbalances in distribution rather than scarcity were seen as the principal cause of social unrest. Addressing these imbalances and raising the standards of consumption (rather than simply increasing levels of consumption) would both improve persons and elevate society, solving the social problems created by industrial capitalism. Legislation could be used to ameliorate the problems of production. Education, they hoped, could prepare Canadians of all classes to appreciate and aspire to higher values and lead lives of meaningful, rather than frivolous, consumption.

### **The Discipline of Political Economy**

In late 1880s and 1890s, the combination of increasing industrialization, the apparent delay in westward expansion, and a new national consciousness resulted in unprecedented public awareness of economic problems and interest in commercial policy.<sup>2</sup> The arrival of Adam Shortt at Queen's, of Stephen Leacock at McGill and James Mavor at the University of Toronto late in the century marked the beginning of political

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<sup>2</sup> Bishop Strachan, for example, planned a course in political economy when developing the curriculum of King's College in 1837. The first generation of academic economists (Ashley, Davidson and Flux) arrived late in the century from Britain. Each moved elsewhere after several years in Canada. Their time here was largely spent working on topics that had interested them before coming, although each also completed some studies of domestic problems, laying the groundwork for the later growth of a distinct Canadian discipline. Crauford D. W. Goodwin, *Canadian Economic thought, The Political Economy of a Developing Nation, 1814-1914* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1961), pp. 158, 172-175, 195-196.



economy as an academic discipline in Canada.<sup>3</sup> O. D. Skelton followed Shortt at Queen's, taking over his position as the John A. Macdonald Professor of Political Science. The Shortt-Skelton era at Queen's was comparable in importance to that of Mavor at the University of Toronto (1892-1924), and of Leacock at McGill (1903-1936). Together these four men oversaw the emergence of economics as a mature academic discipline in Canada, and helped to forge a strong connection between the social sciences

<sup>3</sup> Owram, *The Government Generation*, pp. 10-13.

It should be noted that the origins of the field, which involved a scattered few individuals trained primarily in other disciplines, stood in marked contrast to the high degree of professionalization already achieved in the United States and Great Britain. Shortt intended to become a Presbyterian clergyman, and had studied philosophy at Queen's, Edinburgh, and Glasgow Universities before taking up the teaching of political economy at Queen's. Leacock was educated in literature and the classics and had taught these subjects for eight years at Upper Canada College before going to the University of Chicago to do graduate work in economics. Mavor came to political economy from a background in the applied sciences. Although friends with a number of the leading economists in Britain and Europe, he had no formal training and was self taught. Skelton, who took over from Shortt at Queen's, had studied Latin and Greek and begun his doctoral work in classics. It was only after several years in the business world that he turned to the study of political economy. For biographical material on Adam Shortt, see S. E. D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal: Six Canadian Intellectuals and their convictions in an age of Transition, 1890 - 1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 95-116; Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O. D. Skelton, W. C. Clark, and W. A. Mackintosh, 1890-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1993); W. A. Mackintosh, "Adam Shortt, 1859, 1931," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 1938. On Mavor see Alan Bowker, *Truly Useful Men: Maurice Hutton, George Wrong, James Mavor and the University of Toronto, 1888-1927*, Ph.D. Thesis, York University, 1975, pp. 111-151; S. E. D. Shortt, pp. 119-135; Paul Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire,' *Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980) pp. 44-51. On Skelton, who took over from Shortt at Queen's see Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*; J. L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men, The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 28-34; and Terry Crowley, *Marriage of Minds: Isabel and Oscar Skelton Reinventing Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003). On Leacock, with an emphasis on his work as an economist, see the introduction in Stephen Leacock (Alan Bowker, ed.) *The Social Criticism of Stephen Leacock: The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice and other essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), and Carl Berger, "The Other Mr. Leacock," *Canadian Literature*, Vol. 55, Winter 1973, pp. 25-26, 32.

and the state.

Although this first generation of political economists has been widely studied, their work has generally been associated with the enlargement of government and extension of the responsibilities of the state. This chapter will explore their arguments as a response to increasing productivity, rising levels of abundance, and the development of consumer values.

Classical economic theory understood the economy as a system of production. Consumption was regarded as either the natural consequence of need or as the result of greed. The understanding that "supply creates its own demand" resulted in an almost exclusive focus on production, confident that consumption would take care of itself.<sup>4</sup> Insofar as increases in consumption were explained as the satisfaction of pre-existing unmet needs or the consequence of succumbing to what British economist Alfred Marshall referred to as "unwholesome desire,"<sup>5</sup> policies to stimulate consumption were regarded as either unnecessary or immoral.

For most of the nineteenth century these theories were seen as consistent with economic reality in both the United Kingdom and the United States, the world's major industrial economies.<sup>6</sup> In the context where economic growth was fuelled by the development of the capital goods, it was reasonable to suggest that wealth used for

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Donohue, *Freedom from Want: American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 9-13.

<sup>5</sup> D. Goodman and M. Cohen, *Consumer Culture, A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> For the relationship of economic theory to the economy in America see Donohue, p. 13, and James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 16, 18, 31-40. On the changing relationship of moral imperatives to economic theory in Britain see Matthew Hilton, "The Legacy of Luxury," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2004, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 103-108.

personal consumption was wealth diverted from the development of productive capacity. In the later quarter of the century, however, the capital goods sector entered a period of stagnation. While investment in capital goods stalled, the consumer goods sector began to expand rapidly. At this point many businessmen and some economists began to see consumption as a possible stimulus to growth. New theories shifted the emphasis of economic thought away from the creation of wealth and the search for profit and reconstructed the discipline as the study of supply and demand. Once the aggregate power of multiple consumers was recognized, the habits and desires of the majority came to be seen as a factor in the workings of the economy.<sup>7</sup>

In Canada growth in consumption continued to be examined primarily as a solution to social rather than economic problems. In the world's largest industrial economies, unease with consumption diminished as continually increasing rates of consumption came to be seen as the basis of a strong economy. Policies to encourage consumption followed. In Canada, where domestic markets were small and the economy directed toward exports of raw materials to the mother-country in exchange for finished goods, capital build up began later and remained the principal driver of the economy well into the twentieth century. New developments in economic theory were considered "valid but remote" for a country "on the fringes" of the industrial giants, still dependent upon foreign investment, with a small industrial base and a limited population.<sup>8</sup> The consumption of basic necessities was identified as a social good; however, the ideal of ever increasing rates of consumption was not embraced. Canada's first economists were

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<sup>7</sup> T. W. Hutchison, *A Review of Economic Doctrines, 1870 - 1929* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 252; Donohue, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Owram, p. 13.

willing to rethink the producerist paradigm, but did not shift to a consumerist one.

### Adam Shortt

The man credited with establishing the place of economics and political science in Canadian universities began his studies in religion and philosophy. Born and educated in the villages of Ontario, Adam Shortt was the first native-born Canadian economist and the first to select the domestic economy as a primary field of study. Like many who approached political economy from a background in philosophy, Shortt was reluctant to recognize economics as a distinct science and deplored the separation of the study of economics from ethics and politics.<sup>9</sup> The subject of wealth, he objected, should not be "in itself a kind of final object." The sciences of wealth and government were not independent; consideration of the development of civilization required attention to the desired ends as well as the available means.

In an early essay, written shortly after he returned to Queen's as a faculty member after studies in Edinburgh, Shortt argued that the productivity gains of modern industry had been achieved at considerable cost. The spirit of laissez-faire competition had resulted in great improvements in communication, mechanization, and productivity, but had also made men selfish.<sup>10</sup> Over hundreds of years, a battle of competing interests had taken shape, in which the forces of labour and capital had been "gradually drawing off into separate camps and organizing their forces for active hostilities."<sup>11</sup> The solution

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<sup>9</sup> See Adam Shortt, "The Nature and Sphere of Political Economy," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. I, 1893; Goodwin, p. 185-186; and Ferguson, pp. 47-49.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Shortt, "The Evolution of the Relation Between Capital and Labor", *The Intellectual Life of America*, 1889, p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.



Shortt proposed was the re-alignment of capital and labour through profit sharing.<sup>12</sup> This was a popular choice for many nineteenth century intellectuals and social reformers. In effect, the possibility of industrial peace was linked to changes in distribution rather than changes in ownership and control. Writing during a prolonged era of slow economic growth, political economists and moderate social reformers postulated that giving labour an incentive to increase productivity might reduce conflict and increase the total amount of profit available for distribution. Many hoped that ending the antagonism between labour and capital would, as Shortt expressed it, open the way to a life beyond production.<sup>13</sup> When the "getting of money" was no longer an end itself, increases in production and consumption would open a path leading to the "perfection" of individual and the betterment of society.

While Shortt rejected socialism as a solution to labour unrest, he was not unaware of Marxist theory. Indeed, early in his tenure Shortt added Marx to the economics curriculum at Queen's, replacing a term essay on Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* with one on *Capital*.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Marx, however, Shortt believed that changes in consumption offered the best way beyond the impasse of production. Since the beginning of human history, Shortt explained, progress was the result of man's struggle

<sup>12</sup> Profit sharing and co-operation in industry did not imply socialism, which Shortt adamantly opposed. See also Adam Shortt, "Co-operation," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. V, October 1897, and Adam Shortt, "Recent Phases of Socialism," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. V, July 1897.

<sup>13</sup> Shortt, "The Evolution of the Relation Between Capital and Labor", pp. 160-161.

<sup>14</sup> R. C. Wallace (ed.), *Some Great Men of Queen's* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1941), p. 118. Classical economics distinguished between production and consumption and regarded the unemployed poor as a social problem. George agreed with the basic distinction, but insisted that it was the idle rich, that is, those who received without producing, who violated the principles of a sound and equitable economy. George proposed that a single tax on land would eliminate the concentration of wealth, freeing resources to be used for the common good. Donohue, pp. 17-10.

against nature:

Under stress of providing for food and clothing most labouring men are forced to find employment where it first offers. Thus great numbers of people have to do work which they would gladly avoid. But the kinds of work which the labour classes must do are fixed by the kinds of wares, and the quantities of them, which people will buy. If they buy an unnecessary amount of food, clothing and other mere bodily gratification, if they build unneeded railroads, factories and similar works, but want little good literature, art, entertainment and instruction, then great numbers of men must live by the lower forms of labour and few by the higher.<sup>15</sup>

Without rejecting production as the fundamental driver of economic growth, Shortt argued that consumption choices could influence the conditions of production and ameliorate the problems associated with modern industry. Increases in wages would help to reduce social unrest, but were not essential. Instead, the nation should concentrate on increasing those occupations that were least degrading, slowing the development of industry and the exploitation of natural resources, and developing machinery and mechanical appliances to relieve man from the worst sorts of toil. Production and consumption were not distinct, hostile processes but interconnected and reflexive. Production could be reconstructed by modifying consumption. "The kinds of goods we most require," he wrote, "determine the occupations of our fellowmen . . . If, then, we use and teach others to use more of the higher kinds of goods and services and less of the lower, we shall be calling more men to the higher occupations and fewer to the lower."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Adam Shortt, "The Influence of Daily Occupations on the Social Life of the People," *Sunday Afternoon Addresses, Series Three* (Queen's University: The Alma Mater Society, 1893), p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. The suggestion that changes in consumption could provide access to a more spiritual life also appear in the works of John Ruskin (1819-1900), William Morris (1834-1896), and J. A. Hobson (1858-1940). Hobson in particular argued that consumption could act as an agent of "aesthetic and moral advance." Were incomes to be redistributed to the poor, he wrote, individualized consumption could be increased, promoting craft-based rather than mass-based production techniques. It remains to be

The collective impact of these personal choices could alter the structure of the economy for the benefit of society. Education would shift demand to higher sorts of goods, "transmuting" labour from the mechanical to the artistic and contributing to social progress.

Finally, Shortt acknowledged that not all occupations had the potential to provide satisfaction. Those who "can find no self development in their work must be afforded time and opportunity for taking their true place in life outside of their work."<sup>17</sup> Personal fulfilment need not be solely linked to work, but could also be grounded in consumption. For those like Shortt who saw that consumption choices had the potential to reduce or resolve class conflict, the negative connotations surrounding consumption began to drop away.

The link between self-development and consumption, rather than production, was even more pronounced in an article written nine years later for *The Canadian Magazine*. Asked to discuss "Some Aspects of the Social Life of Canada," Shortt used the opportunity to examine the evolution of Canadian society from the days of the first settlers to the present.<sup>18</sup> Frontier life, he explained, had been limited by the necessity of mind-deadening labour. Now that some Canadians had been able to "accumulate means beyond the needs of the day," the absence of high cultural standards stood revealed. In

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determined whether parallels between Shortt's ideas and these British thinkers were the result of direct links or of similar responses to similar conditions. For discussions of Hobson see Martin Dauton and Matthew Hilton, *The Politics of Consumption; Material culture and citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 66-68; and Hilton, "The Legacy of Luxury," pp. 112-114.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Shortt, "The Influence of Daily Occupations on the Social Life of the People," pp. 67-68.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Shortt, "Some Aspects of the Social Life of Canada", *The Canadian Magazine*, Vol. XI, May 1898, No. 1, p. 6.

spite of their opportunities, this second generation of settlers had focused on only two alternatives: "either they must simply keep on accumulating wealth, or they must spend it without wisdom." Shortt insisted that there was a better way, proposing that it was time to turn from the cultivation of the land to the cultivation of the self.

The proper employment of one's leisure really means the adequate living of life. All the rest of life, its drudgery and its accumulations, obtain meaning and value only as contributing to the most adequate expression of ourselves. Morality itself gets its meaning from aiding to make this self-realisation possible for us . . . We have spent no end of time and talent in learning, better perhaps than in any other part of the world, how most effectively to acquire wealth, but we have not considered it worth our while to make any serious study as to how most perfectly to spend it. Yet after all its only meaning is in its spending.<sup>19</sup>

While some conservative moralists regarded energy spent on consumption as time away from production, Shortt saw increasing productivity as an opportunity to redirect investment from machinery to people, expanding leisure time and facilitating the pursuit of higher cultural and educational goals. While acknowledging that the nation's productive capacity had expanded beyond the provision of basic necessity, he did not suggest that the increasing power of industry made capitalism unnecessary. Instead

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<sup>19</sup> The following year Shortt examined the same issue with a different emphasis, focusing instead on the "role of capital and the place and function of men of great wealth in society." The rise of the millionaire and the rise in the standard of living for the average citizen had gone hand in hand, he asserted. They were both stages in the economic triumph of man over nature. As a consequence of this success, more and more individuals, particularly in the middle and upper classes, would begin to derive their income from invested capital rather than productive labour. They would experience "greater freedom from business care and anxiety, with corresponding opportunity and inducement to find one's creative and realizing expression in other lines." It was inevitable, Shortt remarked, that "for lack of sufficiently definite and recognized standards of the higher life, we shall have to pass through a stage of frivolous and abortive experiment on the part of many wandering souls vainly seeking adequate expression." Shortt concluded by identifying a role for intellectuals in the provision of "sympathetic and constructive criticism" of these choices. Adam Shortt, "In Defence of Millionaires," *The Canadian Magazine*, Vol. XIII, No. 6. 1899, p. 167ff.



Shortt assimilated new possibilities of consumption to the capitalist model, effectively endorsing improved consumer practices as a form of return on investment.<sup>20</sup> Increased consumption did not lead to poverty but to moral and aesthetic advancement. Both here and in his well-known article "In Defence of Millionaires," Shortt associated spending with cultural improvement, condemning those who simply accumulated without spending. Identifying both the civic-minded philanthropist and the educated professional as arbiters and guides to appropriate consumer behaviours, he presented consumption as a possible agent of social progress.<sup>21</sup> Although Shortt's goal was not material expansion, his vision of cultural consumption was as open-ended as that endorsed by business. "Our destiny," he explained, "must be eternal progress with perfection as its goal."<sup>22</sup> Full participation in society included the fostering of economic and social well-being, which underwrote "the liberty to think, to criticize and to act."<sup>23</sup> The aim of social and national life was the "perfection" of humanity. Material and commercial progress could contribute to the attainment of this goal. Democracy was not merely a political term.<sup>24</sup>

Although Shortt had begun to grapple with the implications of increasing abundance, he continued to differentiate between productive and non-productive forms of consumption. Shortt was aware of, and resisted, new theories of marginal utility that sought to orient the economy to consumer demand. The crux of marginal theory held that commodities had more or less value, not on account of the cost of their production, but

<sup>20</sup> On the idea of consumption as a form of return on investment see Scott Cutler Shershow, "Of Sinking: Marxism and the 'General' Economy," *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2001, p. 416.

<sup>21</sup> Hilton, "Legacy of Luxury," p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Shortt, "The Influence of Daily Occupations," p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, on this theme also see Ferguson, pp. 46, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Adam Shortt, "Personality as a Social Factor," *Clarkson Bulletin* Vol. 6. No. 3, July 1909, pp. 100.

because consumers found more or less utility in them. The value of a particular commodity, therefore, was greater or smaller according to the demand for it and not according to the quantity of labour necessary to produce it. Because increased consumption of a commodity had the effect of reducing residual demand, utility fell as supply increased; the price of the final or marginal unit demanded would therefore determine the utility or the value of the entire supply.<sup>25</sup> Shortt protested against efforts to balance "pleasure and pains, present and future, certain and uncertain, high and low" in a "hedonistic calculus,"<sup>26</sup> insisting that a "stable and scientific definition" of value must remain rooted in production.<sup>27</sup>

Shortt rejected this redefinition of value.<sup>28</sup> The law of diminishing utility, if valid at all, held true "for only the barest necessities of life" and was no general economic principle, particularly not for those wants regarded as "distinctively human."<sup>29</sup> Consideration of the proper use of wealth and the question of what is good should not give way to what can be sold at a profit. The "pleasure which one derives from a fine

<sup>25</sup> See Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940*, p. 50 for a discussion of marginal utility in turn of the century economic theory.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Shortt, "The Basis of Economic Value", *Queen's Quarterly*, Volume II, July 1894, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Goodwin argues that Shortt resisted efforts to incorporate demand analysis in a theory of price and misunderstood the logic of marginal analysis. Being "less adept" both at economic theory and as "a student of the analytical tools developing so rapidly in his day," Shortt argued that theoretical formulations should be put aside for the study of history as a guide to economic policy. Goodwin, pp. 186-187. W. A. Macintosh, concurred that Shortt was not "a great master in the social sciences...He achieved no distinctive body of doctrine nor any brilliant synthesis," but valued his role as a teacher who helped to establish the place of Economics and Political Science in Canadian universities. Goodwin, p. 175. At issue is not merely the evaluation of Shortt, but the shift from moral economy to economics. Shortt's understanding of value was grounded in an ethical framework increasingly seen as irrelevant to the emerging discipline of economics.

<sup>29</sup> Adam Shortt, "The Basis of Economic Value," p. 71.

picture or a well written book . . . may largely determine the price which one will pay for such things;" however, that price gave "no ground for determining with any accuracy worth mentioning, the amount of pleasure or satisfaction one gets for a given amount of money, or how much money one will spend to get a certain kind of pleasure."<sup>30</sup> Prices might, in a general way reflect desire, but could never measure the true value of "the higher satisfactions."<sup>31</sup> Pleasure and satisfaction, by their very nature, could not be measured or standardized. Nor was it conceivable to Shortt that increases in high culture might produce a diminishing return. It was, he insisted, the separation of high culture from the market economy and the laws of supply and demand that made it distinctive and gave it value. The store of culture could be added to, but these products could not be consumed in the conventional sense of being used up; nor could their manufacture be structured according to the production schedules of modern industry. High culture, as Shortt understood it, was not open to commodification. The consumer could not be the sole source of value.

In 1910 Shortt, now working in the civil service rather than academia, was asked to address the problem of the rising cost of living by *Industrial Canada*, a publication of

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<sup>30</sup> Shortt consistently distinguished between the value of what Andrew Sayer calls internal goods, that have value apart from their price, and external goods, whose value is determined largely by their price. Internal goods may be commodities and may have utilitarian value but do not have to be evaluated solely in this way. It is the moral implication of the pursuit of internal and external goods that distinguishes them. The difference follows that made by Adam Smith between praiseworthy acts (which are good even if no one happens to praise them) and the desire for praise itself. Internal goods (specific achievements, skills, satisfactions) cannot be commodified; nevertheless, buying commodities may assist in their attainment. On the distinction between internal and external consumption in moral philosophy see Andrew Sayer, "(De) commodification, consumer culture, and moral economy," *Environment and Planning, D: Society and Space*, Vol. 21, 2003, pp. 343, 347, 353.

<sup>31</sup> Victorian moralists regarded "respectable consumption" as a part of the ascendancy of reason over the animal instincts. Hilton, "The Legacy of Luxury," p. 107.

the Canadian Manufacturers Association.<sup>32</sup> Shortt approached the topic by drawing a distinction between the "real" increases in the standard of living and inflationary growth. Current increases in the cost of living, he explained, were the consequence of wages and prices pressuring each other in an ascending spiral. Gaining little advantage, workers and capitalists had put the community as a whole in jeopardy while citizens without direct access to "the industrial and commercial wheel of fortune" stood by helplessly.

At various times Shortt referred to these bystanders as "the community as a whole," "the non-competitive classes," "non-combatants," and victims in the "blind duel" taking place between capital and labour. It was not clear if society was divided into two classes (a class of producers which included both labour and capital and a class of consumers) or three classes (labour, capital, and a consumption oriented middle class of clerks, professionals, public servants, salaried employees and Canadians on fixed incomes), or if all members of society shared the same consumer interests. Sometimes Shortt used 'consumer as a residual category, referring to those who represented neither labour nor capital; at other times the term consumer was used as a comprehensive social category that included all Canadians. Shortt did not articulate a clear understanding of a consumer interest; however, it is clear that he had begun to consider consumption as an aggregate as well as an individual practice.

Shortt did not expand upon this notion. The coming of war changed the context in which Canadians made consumer decisions. Haunted by the post-war possibility of an army of soldiers "turned loose with nothing to do and no means," Shortt urged Canadians

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<sup>32</sup>Beginning in 1907, Shortt's activities expanded beyond academia. He became one of the country's busiest industrial arbitrators, and eventually left Queen's University to head the new agency created to reform the civil service.



to reduce their personal spending to support a programme of capital investment.<sup>33</sup> At a time when America was increasingly turning to consumer fuelled growth, he continued to see the Canadian economy as dependent upon capital investment. Thrift, he hoped, would provide the funds needed to replace foreign capital, making available the industrial investment needed to prevent a post-war depression.

In a wartime address to The Canadian Club, Shortt recapitulated many of his themes from the past two decades, focusing again on the distinction between consumption for the satisfaction of man's lower animal desires and consumption that contributed to cultural and intellectual development. "We have had immense attention paid in our educational institutions to training people for the production of life, but very little attention paid to the training of people for the consumption of life . . . . It takes a great deal of training and a great deal of reflection and a great deal of self educating and culture in order to lead the complex, the high life, to get . . . up into the loftier regions [where] the demand is for goods which are not consumed in the enjoyment of life."<sup>34</sup> Shortt concluded by observing "if a spiritual and educational wave were to pass over this country . . . transferring our desires from the animal to the human basis, we should save immense amounts, and be able to finance ourselves."<sup>35</sup> Calling for plain living and high thinking, he urged the nation to adopt a programme that combined self restraint with capital investment. Even though he foresaw a time of reduced international trade, Shortt

<sup>33</sup> Adam Shortt, "War and Economics," *Addresses delivered before The Canadian Club*, Season 1914-1915, April 26, 1915, p. 63. Shortt consistently advocated savings over spending. Indeed he wrote eloquently of the role that the small savings of labour could play in the common investment fund of the country, when "mingled with those of all others," as a form of advanced and "perfect" co-operation. Adam Shortt, "Co-operation," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. V, October 1897, p. 133.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

failed to see domestic consumption as a vehicle of economic growth. Improving the forms of consumption could provide access to a more spiritual life; however, capital, not consumption, remained the organizing force of industry.

### **James Mavor**

Though he hoped for change, Adam Shortt described labour and capital as warring forces, in which the gains achieved by one side were generally at the expense of the other. His understanding was formed by orthodox economic theory which held that wages, subject to the laws of supply and demand, would inevitably fall to the minimum needed to sustain life. James Mavor, soon to become Shortt's colleague down the road at the University of Toronto, described the production process differently, not as a battle but as a highly organized social exercise. Born in Scotland, Mavor's interest in economics sprang from his involvement in British social reform. A friend of socialist-oriented activists William Morris and Sidney Webb, and a regular correspondent of Tolstoy and Kropotkin, he was regarded as an expert on various forms of co-operative society, including labour colonies and trade unions.<sup>36</sup> Mavor's approach, however, was grounded not solely in the ideals of cooperative socialism but also in his commitment to the developing science of economics and the building up of statistical knowledge. Mavor had a background in the applied sciences and was active in the British Association for the Advancement of Science. This organization, dating back to the 1830s, insisted that government policy should be informed by empirical study rather than politics and ethical argument. Mavor himself had conducted studies during a miners' strike into the caloric intake required to sustain the productive efficiency of workers. These studies led him to

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<sup>36</sup> Bowker, pp. 115-119, Craven, pp. 44-45.

explore the problem of wages and the centrality of consumption concerns.<sup>37</sup>

Economists, Mavor observed, usually considered wages from the point of view of production.<sup>38</sup> Wages should also, he insisted, be considered with reference to the goods they could be used to purchase. Was it better, he demanded to know, to distribute profits in wages and increase the purchasing power of the "the great mass of the people," or in dividends which would compete with other distributed surpluses for high returns in increasingly ill-conceived ventures? What method of distribution would give appropriate rewards and incentives, allow workers to operate at full physical-intellectual activity, and make for better co-operation between capital and labour?

Mavor argued that the answer lay in thinking about labour and capital as only two of a number of factors required in the processes of production.<sup>39</sup> Because each factor was entitled to a share of the profits, the total fund of wages available for distribution could respond not only to the downward pressures of competition but also to the upward

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<sup>37</sup> The appendix to Mavor's paper on wage theories, for example, presented the budgets of Lanarkshire miners, comparing expenditures made while on average wages and during a work to rule campaign, as well as the prison diet of convicts undergoing hard labour in Massachusetts, in order "to stimulate discussion." On the British Association for the Advancement of Science see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact, Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 309-313. Poovey argues that the collection of statistics helped create a new kind of collective conceptual unit. Universally applicable "laws" gave way to facts and grouping of facts which were to be the basis of conclusions that would inform social policy. "Statistical populations" had the appearance of neutrality but were created by highlighting certain features of the subject group while suppressing others for the purposes of classification. The use of statistics in the discussion of poverty was controversial, regarded as the effort to substitute number--the "amoral vehicle of indifferent facts" -- in place of moral knowledge. On the controversy that surrounded the introduction of statistics to the discussion of poverty by Malthus see Poovey, pp. 285, 287-290, 295-296.

<sup>38</sup> James Mavor, "On Wage Statistics and Wage Theories, A Paper Read before the Economic Section of the British Association," (Edinburgh: William Brown, 1888), p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Mavor's complete list of the factors of production included taxation, insurance, cost of materials, rent, interest, wages of management, wages of labour. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

possibility of profits, opening the door to increases in consumption. The most efficient distribution of profits remained to be determined; however, it was possible that increases in capital could be wasteful, while increasing consumption among the working classes could be economically advantageous. While Mavor did not offer any theory of aggregate demand, he did challenge conventional wisdom that saw increases in wages as a threat to profits, and production and consumption as opposites.

Calling for the collection of extensive data on wage rates and living costs, Mavor made clear his interest in ordinary, rather than improving or exceptional, forms of consumption. The shift from the moral evaluation of expenditures to a normative approach rooted in the collection and classification of data helped to open the way to the discussion of consumption in terms of commodities rather than values. Because statistical knowledge rather than general principles was to be the foundation of a science of political economy, Mavor wrote that there must be "as little emotional interest in this or that theory, or this or that policy, as we should have in the . . . discussion of the succession of the rocks in our neighbourhood."<sup>40</sup> Economists should deal not with what ought to be, but with reality as it actually existed.<sup>41</sup> Increases in consumption were not cause for alarm but data for social scientists to consider.

Four years later, Mavor used his inaugural address as incoming Head of the Department of Political Economy and Constitutional History at University of Toronto (1892) to examine "The Relation of Economic Study to Public and Private Charity."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Goodwin, p. 188.

<sup>41</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, p. 129.

<sup>42</sup> James Mavor, "The Relation of Economic Study to Public and Private Charity," Inaugural Lecture in Political Economy and Constitutional History, University of Toronto, 1892, p. 39.



Poverty, Mavor told his audience, was "unsatisfied need." "The need is there," he explained, "the resources to satisfy it are not." Poverty was the "condition of those who live at a low level, whose food, clothing and shelter are . . . inadequate relative to the resources and consumption of those who are living at a higher level." Poverty was not a reflection of moral weakness but was a social condition. While the study of wealth was conducted "in the department of production and distribution," the study of poverty belonged "in the department of consumption." It was the result, not of insufficient production, but of insufficient consumption.

Arguing that it was necessary to remove the discussion of poverty from the realm of morality, Mavor proposed to examine the causes of being poor in a dispassionate manner from an economic point of view.<sup>43</sup> The infirm, the elderly and mothers with small children, for example, had few ways to earn the income needed to raise themselves above the level of chronic want. In such cases, private or, when necessary, public charity was needed if they were to attain a reasonable level of consumption. Those who were able to work but found themselves temporarily unemployed presented a greater challenge. Merely increasing production would create jobs, but what exactly should these men produce? "If we get them to make things for us which we do not want, we simply waste our money; while if we get them to make things for us that we do want, we simply transfer our demand from one set of workmen whom we are just now employing to those

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<sup>43</sup> Mavor was influenced by the work of British ship-owner turned sociologist Charles Booth who had surveyed the poor of East London in 1888-1887, dividing them into four classes or subgroups on the basis of their condition and occupation and potential for improvement. Mavor adopted aspects of Booth approach in "The Relation of Economic Study to Public and Private Charity," p. 44 ff. On the Booth survey see Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow, An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Basil, Blackwell, 1988), pp. 28-30. On Booth's influence on Mavor see S. E. D. Shortt, pp. 125-127.

newcomers who want employment."<sup>44</sup> The solution was not the expansion of the economy through the creation of new needs, but rather the creation of new communities. The "workless" could be transported away from the degradations of the city to self-contained rural colonies.<sup>45</sup> The opportunity to work would undo the ills of urban living and "make men of them."<sup>46</sup> As they "become producers," the balance between supply and demand would be restored. While recognizing that demand created employment and that consumption standards were socially determined, Mavor did not seem to see demand as potentially elastic or open-ended. Solving the problem of poverty was a matter of securing sufficient income, ideally through work but if this was not possible then through the intervention of government or private charity. Identifying a segment of the Canadian population who were failing to consume at respectable levels served to authorize state interference in private lives.<sup>47</sup>

Although Mavor discussed poverty as a social and economic condition rather than a moral weakness, his attitude to what he regarded as over-production and over-consumption was less sanguine.<sup>48</sup> In the context of austerity, Mavor had called for

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> On this theme see Hilton, p. 108, and Giovanna Procacci, "Social economy and the government of poverty," in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (ed), *The Foucault Effect, Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> In 1914, when asked to prepare a textbook on *Applied Economics* for businessmen, Mavor acknowledged that overproduction was now a reality. In many industries the point of diminishing returns had been reached: profits were falling as production levels rose. The interaction between wages and production was described as paradoxical. Setting maximum wages would discourage the best workers, who would see no need to produce more for the same remuneration as their less busy neighbours. Minimum wage laws, on the other hand, would result in discrimination against the weak since employers would rather hire the strongest workers who would produce the most for a fixed rate. Raising wages would have an inflationary effect, actually lowering the standard of living of the

increased attention to consumption. In the context of relative abundance, he was less sympathetic. He linked inflation to rising standards of comfort rather than rising prices, and pointed to increases in "miscellaneous" or discretionary spending as the decisive indicator of increasing incomes. Increases in wages during the war years, he insisted, encouraged the relaxation of moral codes and an orgy of extravagance. All classes in the community, Mavor complained, seem to have been "infected by the desire to raise their standard of comfort."<sup>49</sup> Morals and ethics had been turned "from fixed facts to shifting standards that change from age to age like the fashion of our clothes." The worst offenders were those social groups to whom luxurious living was a new experience. As larger numbers attempted to enjoy greater luxury, both the demand for goods and the reluctance to engage in the labour necessary for production had simultaneously increased. Mavor had urged that the problem of poverty be considered without emotion; he did not always extend this same effort to the consideration of increases in consumption and leisure time. Production, he warned, remained the foundation of a stable economy.<sup>50</sup> "Nothing but harm," he wrote, "can come to a people whose ideal is the avoidance of work rather than the execution of it."<sup>51</sup>

The war, according to Mavor, postponed economic crisis by stimulating demand. Wage savings and high profits delayed the day when Canada would have to face the

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working classes by driving up the demand for better goods, raising prices and subsequently forcing workers to consume items of lesser quality. Rather than tending to equilibrium, the economy now produced unintended consequences. James Mavor, *Applied Economics: a practical exposition of the science of business, with illustrations from actual experience* (New York: Alexander Hamilton Institute, 1914).

<sup>49</sup> Cited in S. E. D. Shortt, p. 138.

<sup>50</sup> James Mavor, "Industry and Finance," *University Magazine*, Vol. XVII, No. 3, Oct. 1919.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

realities of excessive borrowing.<sup>52</sup> However, Mavor warned that the "oscillation of a pendulum probably affords a more accurate figure of the general movement of mankind than movement either invariably upwards or downwards."<sup>53</sup> Rapid expansion would be followed by rapid contraction as the natural equilibrium of the economy reasserted itself.<sup>54</sup>

The tension between Mavor's empirical studies and his moral commitments remained unresolved. Whether consumption itself was productive or non-productive depended upon both the goods involved and the consumer. Raising the consumption standards of the poor benefited both the nation and the economy. Increased leisure time and the satisfaction of an ever expanding list of wants, however, were dismissed as indulgent rather than productive, threatening the economy's capacity to furnish the necessities of life.

### **Stephen Leacock**

Stephen Leacock's antipathy to the materialism of his day was well known. In critical essays and fictional stories he mourned the collapse of traditional values under the onslaught of modernity. He condemned the spread of commercial values in the cultural institutions of the nation and pilloried the consumption habits of the wealthy plutocracy, who, he alleged, effectively controlled the nation's economy. People had been reduced to economic units, evaluated by their ability to produce and consume. The poor were cogs in the wheels of industry; the rich were faceless interests. Wages, contracts and money

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 355-356.

<sup>53</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, p. 134.

<sup>54</sup> Drawing conventional distinctions between luxuries and necessities, Mavor's critique was similar to those made by other economists of his generation, including Alfred Marshall. Hilton, p. 105.



had replaced emotional bonds, family ties, and cultural traditions.<sup>55</sup> "We have gone astray," Leacock wrote, "in the wilderness on the false estimate that we have placed upon wealth and mere pecuniary success. . . Our whole conception of individual merit and of national progress has been expressed in dollars and cents."<sup>56</sup>

What separated Leacock from the purely conservative critics of his day, however, was his acknowledgement that gains had been achieved and that even more were possible. Even when describing modern man as a "poor miserable atom,"<sup>57</sup> he acknowledged that the world's production had been enormously increased by the changes of the industrial revolution. Leacock was especially troubled by the contrast between the vastly increased power of production and the persistence of poverty.<sup>58</sup> His critique was directed not only at the abandonment of traditional values in the pursuit of commercial success, but also at the misuses of the productive power of modern industry. Steam power, machinery and industrial organization had vastly increased wealth, but these benefits had been distributed unfairly.

The problem with the modern economy was twofold. First, the economic strength of the elites allowed them to manipulate production, creating artificial scarcities that increased profits. Second, inequitable distribution of purchasing power resulted in the misallocation of human labour to non-necessities. "The reason why a certain portion of

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Leacock (Alan Bowker, ed.) *The Social Criticism of Stephen Leacock: The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice and other essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. xxv, xxviii.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Leacock, "Democracy and Social Progress," in J. O. Miller (ed), *The New Era in Canada: essays dealing with the upbuilding of the Canadian commonwealth* (London: Dent, 1917), p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Leacock, *The Social Criticism of Stephen Leacock*, p. xxviii, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867 - 1914* (Toronto: University of Press, 1970), pp. 32, 33.

humanity is devoid of the means of subsistence," he wrote, was "not because the means of subsistence are failing, but because only a limited part of human production is directed toward creating them."<sup>59</sup> Unconcerned with the satisfaction of basic needs, the plutocrats who controlled industrial output directed it towards "producing 'values,' not at producing plenty."<sup>60</sup> As well as highlighting the flaws of an economy dedicated to producing profits rather than goods, Leacock shifted the focus of discussion from indulgent consumers to poor consumers. Here were ordinary Canadians struggling, not with a scarcity of goods, but with the means to buy them. Adam Shortt had valued non-mass based individual consumption choices as a way to improve the individual and uplift society. Leacock understood the impact of industry quite differently, valuing the productivity increases of modern industry as the means to secure basic necessities for all Canadians. His vehement critique of unproductive excesses of luxury consumption was paired with the normalization of "ordinary" consumption by working class Canadians.

Leacock demonstrated great sensitivity to patterns of consumption and was a keen observer of the role consumption played in demarcating variations in the social order. While Adam Shortt had emphasized the value of higher consumption as a means of self-development, Leacock followed the critique of Thorstein Veblen and pilloried lavish consumption as a form of status seeking.<sup>61</sup> Both Veblen and Leacock attributed to capital

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Leacock, "Practical Economics: The Theory of Wages," *Saturday Night*, March 4, 1911.

<sup>60</sup> Cited in Berger, p. 33.

<sup>61</sup> Many aspects of Leacock's critique of capitalism paralleled those of American economist Thorstein Veblen, under whom he had studied at the University of Chicago, and whose *Theory of the Leisure Class* had first attracted him to that university. Both economists argued that individual consumers were being denied basic necessities of life by an economic system that made profits by restricting and misdirecting the production of goods. Veblen, however, emphasized that business corrupted workmanship, while

the characteristics of waste most conservative intellectuals associated with working class consumption, dismissing the luxuries of the wealthy and the pretensions of the middle class as evidence of moral decay and self-indulgence. Both men objected that waste and abuse of the system by the elites prevented the emergence of abundance for other members of society. Distinguishing between production for use and money-making, Veblen argued that conspicuous consumption called into question the basis of capitalism itself.<sup>62</sup> He rejected the role of capital in favour of the efficiency-oriented skills of the engineer and the technician. Leacock continued to believe in the necessity of capital and the opportunity for personal gain as a motive force. He reaffirmed producer values of hard work, discipline and thrift, but argued Canada's millionaires failed these ideals. In effect, Leacock condemned conspicuous consumption but defended the right to consume. Unlike Veblen, he was equally dismissive of the expert, the socialist and the millionaire: the issue was not who controlled production but the availability and distribution of consumption goods. Correct allotment, proportional reward and social justice were the profound problems of the twentieth century, he explained.<sup>63</sup> "Give me the houses and the gardens, the yachts, the motor cars and the champagne and I do not care who owns the gravel crusher and the steam plow . . . Consumption goods are the very things that we do want. All else is but a means to them."<sup>64</sup> It did not matter who owned the factory as long

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Leacock believed that business values undercut the social and moral order, substituting commercialism and materialism for higher values. On Veblen's relationship to emerging consumer awareness see Donohue, pp. 35-37, 40, 78-79, 156-159. On Leacock and Veblen see Carl Berger, "The Other Mr. Leacock," pp. 25-26, 32. The influence of Veblen on Leacock, Skelton and Harold Innis, and through them on Canadian economic thought, has often been noted in passing, but remains to be fully examined.

<sup>62</sup> Donohue, pp. 159, 163-165,

<sup>63</sup> Leacock, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*, in Bowker, p. 94.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

as goods were produced and distributed. The value of goods to society was not in the profits they yielded but in their usefulness to consumers.

The urgency of war encouraged Leacock to sharpen his attack on luxury. A series of essays for the War Department drew a rigid line between necessity and excess, condemning a wide range of goods as unnecessary and those who used them as drones and parasites. War revealed the tremendous productive power of modern industry and the ability of the state to direct production away from private profit and toward social goals. While human desire was insatiable, human need could be satisfied with a fraction of the sum of Canada's total output.<sup>65</sup> Productive power could be used to enable mass consumption. Leacock was not especially concerned with the use of goods for the development of high culture (such as Shortt had advocated) but of the distribution of basic goods and services to all.

In the final years of the Great War, Leacock set out his vision of a just society in which citizenship entitled people to basic levels of consumption and the opportunity to advance. "The obligation to die," he wrote, "must carry with it the right to live."<sup>66</sup> Condemning the abuses of wealth, he articulated a broader vision of the right to consume, rooted in citizenship. Every "child of the nation" had the right to be clothed and fed and trained, irrespective of his or her parent's lot.

Under conditions of modern industry, he explained, the relation of work to character had been altered. The nineteenth century had glorified work, in the twentieth waged work was no longer something to be done for its own sake; it was "a mere

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



preliminary to living."<sup>67</sup> Those who could not be integrated into mechanisms of industry could be provided for by the mechanisms of the state, regardless of their ability to contribute to production. The government of every country should supply work (a "livelihood"<sup>68</sup>), and maintenance for the infirm and the aged. Leacock was unwilling to abandon free market capitalism, and continued to regard selfishness as the motivator needed for progress. His solution was increased state intervention in the interests of ordinary Canadians. Capitalism ensured abundance; the task of government was to ensure that mass of working class Canadians had access to a minimum of goods and services. The right to basic consumption was a right of citizenship.

#### O.D. Skelton

While Leacock saw the average consumer as a victim of capitalism and the working class as impoverished by the rapacity of profiteers, O. D. Skelton, Shortt's successor at Queen's, saw a pattern of gradually rising wages, increasing material well-being, freedom and opportunity of development. Born in Orangeville, Ontario in 1878, Skelton entered Queen's University in 1896 as a classics scholar. Regarded as a brilliant student, he explored a variety of career paths before entering the University of Chicago. He studied under a number of prominent economists, submitting a prize winning doctoral thesis on the theme of socialism before returning to Queen's in 1907.<sup>69</sup>

Writing almost twenty years after Shortt, during a period of rapid economic expansion, Skelton regarded higher wages and increasing per capita consumption as

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> On Skelton's thesis, which offered an extensive analysis of Marx's *Capital*, see Ferguson, pp. 103-104; and Joseph Levitt, "In Praise of Reform Capitalism: The Economic Ideas of O. D. Skelton," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, Spring 1983.

proof of the success of capitalism.<sup>70</sup> Improvements in productivity had resulted in rising standards of living for all. The worst abuses of industrialization had fallen away or were coming under regulation. Moralists condemned greed as anti-social, but Skelton celebrated capitalism's ability to harness self-interest, "the most powerful and abiding force in human nature," to society's service.<sup>71</sup> Under capitalism, the possibilities of decent living were increasingly brought within the reach of the vast majority. The stimulus of private enterprise had "so perfected production as to lower prices of goods and services in nearly every line, and to bring within the reach of the many of to-day what were the luxuries of the few of yesterday."<sup>72</sup> Economic value, however, was determined by demand as well as supply. The successful capitalist was not merely skilled at increasing productivity, but also in anticipating the needs and wants of consumers.<sup>73</sup> It was capitalism, Skelton asserted, that "best meets the needs of the millions who every day grow more ambitious in their standards and more insistent in their demands." The effectiveness of the market system lay in its unique ability to connect production with consumption.

It was Skelton's view that increasing social unrest and discontent were the result, not of increasing hardship, but rising opportunities. It was "beyond question that wages were higher, hours were shorter, housing is better, the death-rate lower... Yet all these betterments have merely served to whet the appetite for more... The higher pedestal has opened new horizons ... Standards have advanced faster than incomes. The luxuries of

<sup>70</sup> O. D. Skelton, *Socialism: A Critical Analysis*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), pp. 147-148.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59. Economic expansion was not, however, a smooth process. Conflict was essential to growth in ways that required mediating state action. Ferguson, p. 115.

<sup>73</sup> *Socialism*, pp. 117-127, 130-136; Ferguson, p. 109.

yesterday become to-day's necessities. More and more, home services and preparation are replaced by the tempting but expensive conveniences of the open market. Speed and up-to-datedness must be had at any cost."<sup>74</sup> Although he condemned speculation as destabilizing, Skelton was comfortable that broadly increasing wealth benefited the whole of society by expanding the availability of goods. Under the existing system, the "increase in the world's wealth is constant and substantial, at least a proportionate share falling to the working classes." Private motivations, whether for pre-eminence, fireside comforts or basic survival, supplied the "needful stimulus." Other motivations were inefficient by comparison.<sup>75</sup>

Under conditions of modern industry, society would be able to meet basic needs with a smaller and smaller proportion of labour. The rest of the productive system would be free to meet demands for new services and commodities. Skelton regarded a generalized crisis of overproduction as impossible.<sup>76</sup> "So long as the wants of men are capable of infinite expansion," he explained, "there can be no question of the ability of society as a whole to increase its desires to equal whatever tremendous increase of products and services may be effected." The goal, he declared, "ever fades into the distance; every step upward opens new horizons."<sup>77</sup> Consumption was subject to endless expansion, but it was not inherently wasteful. The choice of material goals was an individual decision, made in the context of man's aspirations for improvement.<sup>78</sup> The

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210, 212, 215.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Skelton was advocating a system of economic liberalism that allowed individuals to choose what they consider best, rather than having an external conception of the good imposed upon them. Markets allow individuals (with sufficient money), to realize their

decision to save or to spend, to direct income to capital investment, education or indulgences was a private matter. Striving, however, was universal. It simultaneously provided the key to personal improvement, to social progress, and to economic expansion. "Divine discontent," fuelling the effort to reach ever-receding goals, was the psychic counterpart to a capitalist economy of expanding production.

In spite of his positive assessment of the economy, Skelton noted a growing sense of "public uneasiness as to the genuineness of the seemingly abounding prosperity."<sup>79</sup> With increasing wealth and "the coming of a more complex industrial system," the question of the distribution of wealth had grown more acute.<sup>80</sup> Canada remained a place of widespread prosperity without the degrading "poverty of the hopeless" that characterised the Old World. However, there was cause for concern, particularly in the middle classes. Canadians strove for material betterment in a global economy, dependent as a trading nation and as a colony on the conditions established by other countries.<sup>81</sup> There, he noted, "was a growing measure of the poverty that still keeps up appearances, of the chronic difficulty caused by the rise of prices, and of a standard of living growing faster than incomes."<sup>82</sup>

Citing evidence from the Department of Labour's 1910 study on rising wholesale prices, Skelton noted that if all products and services had risen equally, the effects would have been negligible, but in actuality wages had risen more slowly than prices, and fixed

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preferences. Of course, in spite of this freedom, consumer choices often reveal considerable efforts made to seek the approval of others. Sayer, pp. 342, 350.

<sup>79</sup>O. D. Skelton, *General Economic History of the Dominion, 1867-1912* (Toronto: The Publishers' Association of Canada Limited, 1913), p. 271.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>81</sup>Crowley, p. 95.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*



salaries even more slowly than wages. Some groups, including manufacturers, farmers and financial services had flourished, giving "the tone and colour of prosperity to the period."<sup>83</sup> Other classes gained by more steady employment, but lost in the distance their incomes would go. Although Canada was a prosperous nation, discontent and inequality were growing, "due rather to the more rapid enrichment of the few than to the impoverishment of the many."<sup>84</sup> Prosperity had driven "a wedge between the well-to-do and the struggling." Social unrest was further aggravated by the sense that wealth and the ability to consume had become "uncoupled" from contributions to production and concentrated "in hands that had done little toward its making. . . . Democracy levelled tastes and heightened ambitions. Growing leisure meant, "for the poor of soul," a need for more expenditure on outward things." Discontent, Skelton insisted, was the result, not of increased hardship, but of rising expectations. It was the outcome, not of the problems of production but of its success. Internal striving fuelled progress, awareness of the achievements of others aggravated social strife.

The coming of war intensified the stresses on the economy. Skelton feared that, in the short term, the nation's productive power would be unable to meet both the rapidly rising needs of government and the demands of private consumers. Skelton described the war as a consumer event requiring "myriads of men, mountains of shells, fleets of ships and airplanes, volcanoes of chemicals, colossal stores of food."<sup>85</sup> Providing these goods at a time when so many labourers had been withdrawn from production would involve reducing personal consumption and transferring labour from non-essential to essential

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>85</sup> O. D. Skelton, "Canadian Federal Finance II," *Queen's Quarterly*, October 1918, p. 204.

occupations. The problem of meeting war needs was not a problem of production, which Skelton believed would, if given sufficient time, automatically adjust to meet demand, but a problem of consumption.

Before the war, Skelton had speculated that government could help to "balance the scales" between rival social groups, legislating the worst abuses of industry and planning public works to offset the cycle of inflation and unemployment. During the war, he proposed more direct involvement. Whereas classical economics had held that supply would create its own demand, Skelton saw that, at least in times of war, demand would direct supply. Opposed on principle to compulsion, Skelton continued to insist that "ordinary motives of self interest and profit seeking" must be relied upon for the positive stimulus needed to increase output. The challenges of war finance were largely fiscal and involved the transfer of purchasing power from consumers to government. The case for income taxes was made in this context: they would reduce consumer demand, redirect the productive power of industry, and forestall the inflationary price increases that would occur if consumer and government had to compete for goods.<sup>86</sup>

The power of the market system was its ability to mediate between the productive capacity of the nation and the things people wanted, avoiding the problems of either planning or coercion. In the past, government policies were devised to encourage the expansion of industry. Increasing production was seen as the best way to increase consumption. Looking to the post-war period, Skelton emphasized that intervention

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<sup>86</sup> The pros and cons of wartime price controls are discussed by two Skelton protégés. See W. C. Clark, "Should Maximum Prices be Fixed?" *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, April 1918; and W. A. Mackintosh, "Economics, Prices and War," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. XXVI, April 1919.

would need to continue, both to curb industrial and to control consumer demand.<sup>87</sup> With foresight and management, Skelton predicted, Canada could become "a land where every man and women among us will have a fair chance to share in the decencies and comforts and the possibilities of development that have hitherto been restricted to the few."<sup>88</sup> The benchmark of progress was not simply increasing wealth and productivity, but increasing consumption by ordinary Canadians. Canada's promise as a liberal democratic society was linked with the opportunity to consume and the pursuit of self-fulfilment.

### Conclusions

The response to consumption by Canadian economists was inconsistent. Grappling with new notions of surplus that called into question prevailing assumptions about scarcity, they acknowledged that consumption standards were socially determined but remained suspicious of increases in spending. They condemned excessive acquisition and speculation as potentially destabilising, even while celebrating gains in the standard of living as evidence of national progress. Consumption increases were linked to improvements in the quality of life, but were seldom considered as a possible vehicle of growth. Increased access to appropriate consumer goods was seen as a way to restore the social solidarity fractured in the transition to modern industrial capitalism. Thus it was largely for social and political rather than strictly economic reasons that the ability of the working classes to consume came to be regarded as a public rather than a purely private matter.

Regardless of the value they placed on new economic theory, these men shared the common understanding that their role as economists involved the provision of

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<sup>87</sup> Ferguson, p. 108.

<sup>88</sup> O. D. Skelton, "Canadian Federal Finance II," p. 228.

knowledge and expertise that would assist society in reaching its ideals. Although they often complained about the intellectual's diminishing authority and position in society, they were each successful in negotiating the transition to new roles. All four wrote and spoke extensively and advised governments. Shortt and Skelton moved from academia to positions in the federal civil service. Leacock was a tremendously popular author. Mavor offered financial advice and brokered business deals. With the possible exception of Leacock (whose objections as a social critic diverged notably from the conventional tone of his economics textbook), they understood economics as a science rooted in empirical study and the collection of statistics.

They formulated no coherent theory of consumption, but rather held in common a series of understandings which they made known in their writings and addresses, in their work as teachers, as department heads, as advisers to government, and as the men who recommended advisers to government. Grappling with the challenges of Canada's transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society, they began to expand the conception of democracy to include a material as well as a political dimension. Recognition of modern consumption practices entered into their discussion of poverty, pensions, and price controls. While this conception of political economy was far from radical, it envisaged a growing role for government in the mediation of social conflict through intervention in the distribution of society's wealth. Although they proposed different degrees of government involvement in the economy, they began to postulate a link between the administrative state and the citizens of Canada rooted in a loosely conceived right to basic necessities. In the context of an emerging consumer society, the expansion of the state and the expansion of democracy came to be seen as



complimentary.

In time, writers and observers, including political economists, would become more accustomed to surplus. Increased personal spending would not be seen as antithetical to production, but a condition of Canadian life, able to co-exist with and perhaps contribute to economic growth. The acceptance of the consumer in economic discourse was the first step toward creating a frame of reference that would authorize consumer behaviours, values and policies. The meaning, as Shortt expressed it, was no longer in the accumulation of wealth, but in the spending.

### 5. The Promise of a More Abundant Life: Inflation, Consumption and the State

Few Canadian intellectuals before World War One envisioned a consumer driven economy with growth and high business profits fuelled by abundant consumer purchasing. Classical economics had discussed producers and consumers as distinct interests. Consumers, it was understood, wanted low prices; producers wanted high prices. Consumers wanted an abundant supply of goods and services; producers wanted to limit supply and control markets. While it was recognized that, as Adam Smith famously observed, "consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production," it was the supply side of the economy which became the subject of considerable study while the demand side was largely taken for granted.

By the late nineteenth century, some Canadians began to consider increases in productivity as a means to more consumerist but still largely non-material goals, including spiritual fulfilment and personal development. However, most social critics continued to discuss modernization within the context of a producer's framework. This was true regardless of whether the increasing abundance of goods was associated with the erosion of traditional values and the decline of society, or regarded more positively as a solution to labour unrest. Indeed the most radical views tended to be the most oriented toward production, championing labour as the source of the nation's wealth. It was also true, however, that perspectives of progressive social reform and consumerism shared an emphasis on material standards of living; both linked the increasing consumption of goods and rising standards of living with social progress. As economic development accelerated, distinctions between producer and consumer interests, which at least had seemed clear to some when rooted in the rhythms of agrarian society, were challenged by

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the economic and social changes that accompanied large-scale industrialization.

Urbanization, gains in productivity, changes in income and the development of new products increased the visibility of the spending choices of all members of society, the very rich as well as the very poor.

In the years of expansion leading up to the war, rising prices were a frequent and controversial topic of public discussion. As the economy boomed and prices rose, it became clear that the benefits of prosperity were unevenly distributed. Spending patterns suggested that shifts in the economy had benefited financiers, farmers and unionized labour. Others, particularly the very poor, those on fixed incomes and salaried middle class professionals, were less fortunate. A regular income had once been a source of security, now it meant a struggle to keep up with inflationary increases. Meanwhile, modest gains in hourly earnings, more regular employment and the introduction of social programs—however limited—meant that wage labour had been gradually able to increase its purchasing power.

Insofar as price changes coincided with so many other changes in the standard and style of living, concerned Canadians seem to have been responding not only to the rising cost of living but also to changes in their personal economic and social status. Rising costs made consumers more conscious of their purchasing habits and were in themselves fundamentally disorienting, calling into question the value of goods and the meaning of money.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, increases in the cost of living coincided with a significant expansion in the availability and selection of goods, adding to the sting of high prices. For many social critics, particularly the most conservative, awareness of change had

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<sup>1</sup> See Horowitz, p. 68 ff for a review of the cost of living debates among American middle class professionals.

already begun to coalesce around the figure of the Canadian consumer. Now rapid rises in the cost of living expanded the discussion beyond social criticism, linking the term consumer specifically with the daily challenges of shopping. Price changes drew attention to the degree to which Canadians of all classes were now buying basic components of daily life. Inflation intensified the struggle between traditional values such as work, self-restraint and thrift, and the acceptance of new comforts and patterns of consumer purchasing. With so many Canadians affected and no clear understanding of causes or solutions, appeals for government involvement mounted. Those purporting to speak on behalf of the consumer—the press, social reform and labour leaders, women's groups—called for investigation and intervention, making clear that certain aspects of consumption were regarded as specifically political. As prices rose, consumer experiences became a mobilizing force; a link was forged between the rights of citizenship and the ability to consume.<sup>2</sup>

In 1909 and again in 1913 the government responded to intense public concern with studies to measure the extent, and where possible, to determine the causes of rising prices. These studies are of interest not so much because of the conclusions they reached,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Hilton argues that a consumer consciousness emerged in Britain around the turn of the century, when people formulated a sense of what they earned in terms of what they could buy. The ability to purchase, rather than the wage, became the focus of wage negotiation. Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain, The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1, 51-52. Richard Hofstadter makes a somewhat similar case in America, arguing that protest against rising prices added to the strength of Progressivism and cut across class lines to become a focus of common concern among various interest groups. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp. 172-173. Both Hilton and Hofstadter discuss consumerism as a mobilizing social force, able to galvanize public action and government intervention. Insofar as industrialization was less advanced in Canada, consumer experiences served less as a unifying force than a common point of discussion. Consumer concerns were entrenched in political discourse and in government, but without quite the same unifying or mobilizing power.



which were at best tentative, but because they point to significant transformations in the understanding of public and private life. An area of life once regarded as a matter of private responsibility had become a public controversy requiring government investigation. Measuring the consumption habits of Canadians served to normalize new consumer behaviours and opened the door to concepts of aggregate consumption. Through this process of data collection and collation, the category of the Canadian citizen as a wage spender as well as a wage earner became embedded in the workings of government.<sup>3</sup> The direction of influence was reciprocal: responding to public appeals, government expanded its mandate and linked itself to the normalization of new consumer practices and the promise of expanding consumption opportunities; at the same time, the study of shifting consumer practices by government conferred a new legitimacy on consumption.

The consumption practices of Canadians were only one of many new areas of government intervention in a period characterized by the significant expansion of the state.<sup>4</sup> Intellectual changes were critical in providing impetus to expand government: the conviction that behaviour could be predicted led to the creation of an infrastructure that

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<sup>3</sup> This argument draws upon the essays collected in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (ed), *The Foucault Effect, Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), and on the discussion of systematic sorting in M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), especially p. 198 ff.

<sup>4</sup> The rapid expansion of government gave rise to demand for civil service reform and for systems of classification to rationalize growing bureaucratic structures. This point was made specifically by Griffenhagen and Associates, the American firm which devised the 1918 classification system for Canada. See "A Farwell Contribution from Griffenhagen and Associates Limited" in *The Civilian, Canadian Civil Service Staff Publication* (February 1921), p. 69 cited by V. Seymour Wilson, "The Influence of Organizational Theory in Canadian Public Administration," in Kenneth Kernaghan (ed), *Canadian Public Administration: Discipline and Profession* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1983), pp. 106-107.

would allow for the greater direction of society through government intervention.<sup>5</sup> Movements of social reform arrived slowly in Canada in comparison with America and Britain; however, after the turn of the century pressures for reform grew. Underpinning the various initiatives was a common concern that laissez-faire principles were inadequate to the challenges of modern society. Instead, Canadian intellectuals turned to the social sciences and appealed for the expansion of government, calling in effect, for the application of scientific management to society as a whole.<sup>6</sup> The rapid expansion of various government services had not been co-ordinated with the general machinery of administration. The inefficiencies of everyday government, evidence of waste, poor planning and poor execution, and irregularities in the purchasing practices of various departments had been the subject of various probes by the press, the opposition, and the government itself in 1906, 1908 and 1912.<sup>7</sup> Inquiries emphasized problems in public expenditure but growing public concern led to a complete investigation of the civil service. In much the same way that the growth of private enterprise in the late nineteenth century had led to the demand for structural rationalization in industry to which scientific management was the answer, calls for state-led social reform in the early twentieth century led to an unprecedented growth in government function, which in turn gave rise

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<sup>5</sup> Academics provided the theoretical supports for activist government, calling for the regulation of capitalism's excess and the mediation of relations between capital and labour to quell social unrest. The expert advisor replaced the man of character with the wisdom of experience as the ideal public servant. As Adam Shortt explained: this was "an age of experts" and expertise was the key to efficiency. Both expertise and efficiency were business values, and the prominence of these terms in the discussion of civil service reform gives an indication of the penetration of business values into all areas of public life during this period. D. O'ram, *The Government Generation*, pp. 41-45, 73, 84-86.

<sup>6</sup> On the parallels between the expansion of government during the American Progressive era and in early twentieth century Canada see Wilson, pp. 106-108.

<sup>7</sup> R. C. Brown and R. Cook, *Canada 1896-1921, A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 193-194.

to a demand for the rationalization of the growing bureaucratic structure.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to recognize that the values of bureaucracy were different than the political values of representation, responsibility and responsiveness, terms prominent in last century's so-called fight for responsible government and associated with the building of the nation during a period that also saw the build-up private enterprise. The shift to corporate models of business at the turn of the century, and the various crises of modernism that resulted, precipitated the development of new systems of governance focused on administration. The organizational revolution created a new social class of managers in both business and government. Bureaucratic values of economy, efficiency and effectiveness would henceforth be implicit in administration of public affairs, imported directly from new theories of industrial management.<sup>9</sup>

The authority of the bureaucracy was rooted neither in property nor in labour, but in power exercised without ownership.<sup>10</sup> Acts of administration, whether in the corporation or the managerial state, had the effect of dispersing power, opening a middle

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson, pp. 106-107.

<sup>9</sup> The scientific management and the classification movement were decisive influences on the development of government administration in Canada. Recommendations were presented for improved systems of administration and appointments modeled on both the British merit principle and American business systems, although implementation did not always follow. The tasks of government were examined as mechanistic processes, all civil service positions were classified by function and examinations devised to determine which candidates were best qualified to fulfill specific positions. Work was separated from worker. The British tradition of administrative generalists was replaced by a hierarchical structure of considerable complexity and rigidity, with an emphasis on technical specialization and an ideology of business efficiency. J. E. Hodgetts et al., *The Biography of an Institution, the Civil Service Commission of Canada, 1908-1967* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972) pp. 65-66, 71, and J. E. Hodgetts, "Implicit values in the administration of public affairs," in Kenneth Kernaghan (ed), *Canadian Public Administration: Discipline and Profession* (Toronto: Butterworth's, 1983), p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> On the novelty of this position see Susman, pp. xxi-xxii.

ground which, like consumerism, shifted attention away from the conflict between labour and capital.<sup>11</sup> The corporate form and the expansion of management were fundamentally linked with increases in productivity and expanded possibilities of consumption. In the realm of public administration, the measurement and analysis of consumer spending was integrated into the working of the managerial state, opening the way to the exploitation of consumer identities for political purposes. By the time of the 1935 election, consumption would be recognized as a legitimate facet of citizenship and a practice that transcended class interests with the potential to unite voters.

### Measuring Inflation

The collection of cost of living figures was begun by the Department of Labour with the expectation that this information would prove helpful in the resolution of trade disputes. When the Department was established in 1900, one aspect of its initial mandate was to "collect, digest, and publish" information that would be useful in negotiation and arbitration proceedings.<sup>12</sup> To this end the *Labour Gazette* was created as a "medium for...the registration of facts."<sup>13</sup> Articles in the *Labour Gazette* focused primarily on general industrial conditions, including employment opportunities, wage rates, union activities, the outcome of strikes and the passage of labour legislation. Much of the

<sup>11</sup> Livingston, for example, sees corporate form as an enabling condition of hegemony. Dispersing power through society broadened the terrain of political struggle and opening a middle ground that would become the terrain of cultural politics. James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 54-55. Hilton similarly suggests that the politics of consumption has persistently offered itself as a middle way or "third" solution in the struggle between capital and labour. Hilton, pp. 1, 12-14, 296-297.

<sup>12</sup> David A. Worton and Institute of Public Administration of Canada, *The Dominion Bureau of Statistics: A History of Canada's Central Statistics Office and Its Antecedents, 1841-1972, Canadian Public Administration Series, Number 22* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.



material was sent to Ottawa from across the country through a network of local correspondents. A young social reformer with an interest in politics, W. L. Mackenzie King was hired to edit the new journal. When King's interests turned to conciliation and special investigations, the day-to-day work involved in the preparation of the *Gazette* fell to his close friend Henry ("Bert") Harper, and after Harper's untimely death in 1902, to Robert Hamilton Coats, a young journalist who would soon make himself Canada's foremost expert in the co-ordination of financial and economic data as head of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.<sup>14</sup>

By 1904 the work of the Department was proceeding on parallel paths, both the system of industrial relations devised by King and the statistical work handled by Coats were part of the same effort to manage escalating conflicts between labour and capital. King worked to develop and implement new practices of arbitration that would smooth the production process and ensure the steady supply of important goods and services. Coats emphasized the need to measure consumption as well as production and increasingly began to emphasize those factors that determined the ability to consume. Both men were committed to the management ideal and sought to de-emphasize conflicts in the realm of production by focusing on the common interests of Canadians as consumers. Underlying this was a belief that the facts, if clearly presented, would provide a direction for policy solutions.

The idea of Canada as a nation of consumers, whether conceived of collectively

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<sup>14</sup> King and Coats were themselves transitional figures, in positions of power as much because of their character and connections as their professional training. However, both men placed high value on expertise, cultivated their professional standing, and understood their own work as advancing the development and application of the social sciences.

as the beneficiaries of industrial production or statistically as the aggregate of individual acts of buying, emerged in conjunction with practical initiatives that aimed to reduce social unrest to more manageable problems of human relations and technical measurement. Techniques of inquiry were integral to both King and Coats, who emphasized managerial sciences and the principles of neutral investigation as the basis of a professional approach. There were of course still significant differences in approach. King insisted that the "purely economic questions" in industrial disputes were easily adjusted, and that it was the "personal antagonisms," "prejudice and bitterness and individual antipathies" which fostered strife and made reconciliation impossible.<sup>15</sup> Coats argued that labour unrest, wages and the cost of living were interconnected issues. "To a labouring man," he insisted, "the first question is the obtaining of employment, the second is the amount of remuneration he is to receive, and its relation to what he has to spend for subsistence."<sup>16</sup> Noting that the *Labour Gazette* was already dealing adequately with employment conditions, Coats suggested that more effort was needed to regularize the production and presentation of statistics related to wages and the cost of living. Wage data had been tracked since 1900, but Coats argued that, from the workingman's point of view, the struggle for wages centred on the commodities that wages purchased. While industry saw wages as a deduction from profit, workers were interested in what wages would buy.<sup>17</sup> Coats understood that this varied from region to region and urged King to

<sup>15</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King, *William Lyon Mackenzie King Diaries, 1893-1950*. Library and Archives, Canada, <http://King.collectionscanada.ca>, December 31, 1914, pp. 10, 161.

<sup>16</sup> Worton, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> In effect there had been preliminary recognition of a consumer interest (workers needed wages to buy necessities), but without evidence of a broadly based consumer consciousness.

create a separate wages and cost of living statistics branch that would, first, collect price information, and then "reduce" this data to a system of index numbers and charts that would reveal the tendencies affecting the cost of living throughout Canada.<sup>18</sup> Due to lack of resources (and possibly insufficient interest from King<sup>19</sup>), little action was taken until 1909.

In 1909-1910 the Department of Labour responded to mounting public concerns over the rising cost of living with two initiatives intended to bring clarity to the situation. Acknowledging that "no public question at the present moment equals in general interest the abnormal cost of living," the *Labour Gazette* announced the beginning of "more comprehensive and systematic" method of analysis. A monthly review of changes in wholesale prices was already published in the *Gazette* and used to indicate tendencies in both the cost of living and industrial conditions. It was increasingly apparent, Coats observed, that these different goals would be better served by two sets of figures. Retail prices, representing the actual cost of goods to the consumer, would give a better indication of changes in the cost of living. They were, Coats explained, a statistic "affecting ... the immediate personal well-being of nearly every class in the community."<sup>20</sup> Wholesale prices and the prices of important raw materials would provide a better indication of general economic conditions, including industrial production and job growth. Beginning in February 1910 the *Gazette* would present separate monthly price summaries of two hundred and thirty wholesale and thirty-four retail commodities.

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<sup>18</sup> See Worton, pp. 49-50, for a detailed account of this exchange.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire,' *Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 220; Worton, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> *Labour Gazette*, February 1910, p. 894.

The second initiative was the preparation and publication of a special report designed to measure "as accurately as possible" changes in wholesale prices in the past two decades. The purpose of this special inquiry was to carry the investigation backwards in time in order to provide a benchmark for future comparisons, and "at the same time" to indicate tendencies in the cost of living that were of special interest at the present. In spite of the desire for a precise measure of changes in the cost of living, it would be necessary to rely upon wholesale prices "to construct a sample of adequate breadth and depth" as necessary data on retail prices was simply not available. It was, however, Coats stated the "consumption standard" which had "formed the basis of selection"<sup>21</sup> when determining which items to track. While the inquiry was confined to fluctuations in wholesale prices for practical reasons, it would, he assured readers, still serve to "indicate general tendencies" in the cost of living.<sup>22</sup>

The *Report on Wholesale Prices* (1910) attempted to establish a point of reference to measure changes in the cost of daily life for what Coats described as "the community as a whole."<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, the construction of a general index number, itself a complex process discussed in detail, revealed that wholesale prices had risen thirty-five percent from the baseline decade of 1890-1899. This number was widely cited as a benchmark and effectively positioned the Department as an authority on the cost of living and introduced the issue of the cost of living into formal government reports.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Hamilton Coats and the Canadian Department of Labour, *Wholesale Prices in Canada, 1890-1909, Special Report* (Ottawa: Government Print Bureau, 1910), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Government effort of behalf of the Canadian consumer was not new, but had been limited to the regulation of individual products in the context of trade or public health legislation. Federal government intervention began as early as 1874, when an amendment



Coats warned readers that rising prices did not necessarily mean that the cost of living had increased. The need to use wholesale numbers to examine domestic price changes was indicative of the challenges involved in constructing data relevant to new economic conditions. Wholesale prices, Coats pointed out repeatedly, were not a true proxy for retail prices. Rents, perhaps the largest expenditure for most families, had not been considered. Moreover, the impact of price rises could not be determined without knowledge of changes in wage rates which in many cases had also risen during this period. Seeking to put the study in context, Coats continued to counterpoint aggregate statistics with individual consumer practices. Collective choices could be subject to

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to the Inland Revenue Act made it an offence to knowingly sell adulterated food or drink. As the number and complexity of products increased and the area of their distribution expanded, provisions were added against misbranding and false labeling (1907, 1920). Concerns generated in the United States by an exposé of the meat packing industry were widely publicized in Canada, leading to the introduction of federal inspectors in all packing and canning factories involved in inter-provincial or export trade. The introduction of quality standards, packaging and accurate marketing soon followed. Provincial efforts to regulate tainted milk began as early as 1868 (Ontario) and 1870 (Quebec) and expanded as needed to protect public health. Insofar as Federal regulations were advanced under the aegis of trade, regulations were equally designed to protect public health, to protect consumers from fraud, and to improve production for trade and export. Government regulation increased as regional and national markets developed. With the move away from face-to-face transactions and the introduction of packaged and manufactured goods in which the nature and quality of products could potentially be disguised, it was regarded as necessary to devise substitutes for the informal controls of the neighbourhood market. In an early study of government expansion, J. A. Corry suggested that intervention originated in the desire to protect both consumers and small producers from fraud, and to create guarantees that would improve trade by reassuring Canadians that it was fundamentally safe to participate in extended commercial networks. Intervention at the time of depression, he argued by way of contrast, was an attempt to find a substitute for the perceived failures of the free market through state regulation, especially of markets in natural products. Investigation into the cost of living signaled an expansion of the state's interest in to the private purchasing decisions of its citizens, and a new understanding of the relationship between private consumption and the larger economy. J. A. Corry, *The Growth of Government Activities Since Confederation* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, 1939), pp. 20-28, 40.

analysis; however, the individual consumer was "a law to himself."<sup>25</sup> While consumption choices were the outcome of personal decision-making, the process of organizing data was instrumental in producing a collective consumer interest. Representing the choices of individual Canadians statistically gave direction and form to the discussion, transmuting desires that were irrational or random when considered on an individual basis—irrational at least in the sense that they were unpredictable—into a coherent picture of collective practice. The statistician's method drove the process, reinforcing some characterizations as irrational while presenting others as amoral.<sup>26</sup> Indeed Coats proposed that the scope of future inquiries be broadened to allow statisticians to set different budgets for different classes. Permitting the study of more uniform consumption standards within each class would, he explained, provide a baseline for measuring change. The process of data collation neutralized the moral weight attached to consumer practices by aggregating individual acts of spending into collective patterns of expenditure. Meanwhile, by virtue of the investigation process itself, the government had acknowledged that its citizens were increasingly dependent upon the marketplace for the necessities of daily life, laying the groundwork for a new understanding of Canadians as consumers.

The publication of the *Report on Wholesale Prices* confirmed what was already widely suspected, adding to, rather than calming, public discussion. The *Canadian Annual Review* devoted six pages of its 1910 edition to a survey of the increasingly

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 489.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Poovey describes organizing and interpreting data as a process of "making sense" that makes certain aspects of the world available for discussion. Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact, Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. xi-xv, 1-5.

intense and wide ranging discussion, citing numerous experts and opinion leaders, as well as the results of inquiries conducted by the press and various levels of government across the nation.<sup>27</sup> Rising prices were acknowledged to be a worldwide phenomenon with multiple causes. Mackenzie King, now Minister of Labour, noted six possible factors including extravagance of the rich, the high standard of living among the mass of people, increases in population through immigration, increase in the supply of gold, large expenditures in public works and higher wages.<sup>28</sup> There was no consensus. Some experts emphasized reduction in supply (including the closing of the open range, the increased production of extravagances at the expense of necessities, the shift in population from rural to urban settings and therefore from production to new service industries). Others emphasized increases in demand (immigration, wage gains and rising standards of living).

The return of strong economic growth diffused the issue, although the high cost of manufactured goods, particularly in comparison to the wholesale prices obtained by farmers for agricultural products, was a significant factor in the 1911 federal election. A sharp decrease in employment in 1913 in conjunction with continuing high prices brought the cost of living to the forefront of public discussion once again.<sup>29</sup> Accusations again flowed freely. Changing standards and expectations, the availability of new goods and services, and the shift from local to national sources of food were all implicated, as well

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<sup>27</sup> J. Castell Hopkins, "The Increased Cost of Living in Canada," *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (Toronto: 1910), pp. 298-304. These included the *News of Toronto*, the *Winnipeg Telegram*, the *Montreal Star and Herald*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *St. John Standard*, and the daily paper in Halifax. Investigations were discussed or carried out by provincial governments in Ontario and Manitoba and municipal authorities in Regina.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>29</sup> *Canadian Annual Review*, 1913, pp. 313 to 321.



as the inflationary pressures of a booming economy. Changes and challenges in methods of distribution were increasingly noted as contributing factors, including bad roads and high freight charges, cold storage, the use of oiled wrapping papers, and even the switch from boxes to barrels for packing apples. The extravagances of women and the drift of young men from farms to cities were also commented upon. As Coats dryly observed, the list of causes could be "enlarged almost indefinitely." One writer had enumerated over eighty.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living**

The implications of a developing consumer consciousness for government became clear with the appointment of a board of inquiry in December of 1913. The board, composed of four "permanent officials of the Government," including John McDougald, Commissioner of Customs, C.C. James, Agricultural Commissioner, J. U. Vincent, Deputy Minister of Inland Revenue, and R. H. Coats, Chief Statistician of the Department of Labour, was instructed to investigate increases in the cost of living and "the causes which have occasioned or contributed to such result."<sup>31</sup> However, as the Board's chairman, John McDougald would soon observe, the "cost of living is not really a simple question, and the more closely it is examined the less simple it appears."<sup>32</sup>

From the outset there was tension among the members, with Coats upholding the principles of a professionalized civil service, expressing concern about the ad hoc nature of the board's approach and the absence of "any framework" within which to access the

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<sup>30</sup> *Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living*, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1915).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



evidence that was to be gathered.<sup>33</sup> When the board finished hearing evidence in June of 1914, Coats suggested that a memorandum be prepared by the Department of Labour, outlining the general economic tendencies behind the rise in prices. With the declaration of war in August 1914, board members seemed to believe that the need for a final report had been indefinitely postponed. When Prime Minister Borden requested a submission in late December, the committee seemed to have been caught by surprise. McDougald prepared a summary of the findings and requested that Coats submit his material for inclusion. Coats, objecting to the narrative style of McDougald's draft as well as the haste with which McDougald sought to push the final report through, sought to include a lengthy exhibit of facts and analysis. McDougald added some of this data, but not the analysis to his summary. Coats, still dissatisfied with the absence of analysis, refused to sign. After extended discussion a compromise was reached and published in February of 1916.<sup>34</sup>

The final publication was over two thousand pages long with considerable duplication, reflecting the split between McDougald and Coats, a divide marked not by political affiliation but rather methodology, age and orientation. McDougald's summary focused on the rising cost of foodstuffs, particularly on demographic shifts, changes in methods of distribution, and changes in the standard of living that affected demand. His tone was frequently disapproving. If Canadians found themselves in stringent circumstances, they had only themselves to blame. Coats, on the other hand, took a much more detached approach, arguing that at least two thirds of the rise in prices was mainly

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<sup>33</sup> Worton, p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> See Worton, pp. 54-56 for a more detailed discussion of the negotiations involved in the production of the final report.

technical in nature. Social phenomena were "in the main incidental," he asserted, "they are not the tide, they are rather waves upon the tide."<sup>35</sup> The submission he prepared on behalf of the Department of Labour consisted of statistical tables documenting sector-by-sector changes in prices and, where appropriate, the per capita consumption of goods and services.<sup>36</sup>

The two parts of the report represented different responses to changing patterns of consumption. Coats, applying the systematic practices of modern government, set out to measure and give form to new norms of consumption using the tools of statistical analysis. McDougald, now in his late sixties represented the moral framework of late Victorian Canada. He had been a local merchant, the Member of Parliament for Pictou County, Nova Scotia (a renowned stronghold of Scotch Presbyterianism dedicated to higher education and national service), and a Commissioner of Customs since 1896. As the voice of tradition and experience, he emphasized the costs associated with every forward step.<sup>37</sup> New methods of distribution were a case in point. The advantages of cold storage, packaged goods and telephone ordering were clear, but these conveniences reduced "the amount of food value received for a given expenditure of money." Buying foods out of season added to costs; cold storage opened the way to possible hoarding and price manipulation; the shift from bulk purchasing to wrapped packages increased prices and introduced the potential for misleading consumers, and so on. McDougald

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 1068.

<sup>36</sup> The entire report received favourable attention in the community of professional economists, including praise from Alfred Marshall and from Wesley Clair Mitchell, who described the investigation as "a real contribution to economic science" and precisely the kind of work which is most needed for bettering our understanding of current economic developments, and for guiding our economic policy wisely." Worton, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> *Canadian Who's Who*, (Ottawa, 1910), p. 155.

highlighted the characteristic markers of modern consumption, including packaging, advertising, labelling and national branding. These innovations, he acknowledged, added convenience and cleanliness (which were in themselves relatively recent values) but also raised the cost of living.

The adulteration of products, it was objected, had been "conspicuously prevalent" during the recent period of advancing prices. Prosperity had been accompanied by waste, particularly in foodstuffs. Attention was drawn to waste in marketing, in both the commercial and domestic preparation of cooked foods and in excessive advertising. Other examples involved new services that had transformed labour once provided free of charge by the housewife into commodities to be purchased, including ready-made foods, laundry services and the use of the telephone "to demand frequent deliveries of parcels of small value at irregular times." Sadly, the "wholesomeness of the monotonous fare of the fathers had been denied and the abundance of the modern table praised as evidence of our advanced civilization."<sup>38</sup> Canada had become a country where people could afford to buy "for flavour or tenderness instead of nutrition." "Thrift is no longer inculcated as of old," McDougald complained. "It is easier and quicker to buy a new article than to repair the old."<sup>39</sup>

Although McDougald emphasized problems of waste and fraud, his dominant concerns stemmed from changes in the standard of living. The "wants of the people" he observed, "have been multiplied and diversified on every side. They demand more and better things. Their requirements are larger, more varied and more exacting."<sup>40</sup> Luxuries

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-120.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume I, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

as well as necessities had multiplied. The automobile industry, he asserted, was a case in point. It was an industry of "great reproductive ability," certain to be an important agent in the future production of wealth.<sup>41</sup> However, while twelve million dollars had been spent on automobiles, over ninety percent of this sum had been "essentially devoted to purposes of recreation." While "reasonable recreation and reasonable luxury" might be accepted as "necessary for modern progress . . . the price has to be paid and the bill is found in our high cost of living."<sup>42</sup> The potential of new technologies lay in their commercial application; however "labour expended in the production of luxuries is principally lost in an economic sense."<sup>43</sup> In a similar vein, he objected that people were working fewer hours and complained that there were "more of the inefficient and the idle in our midst." Referencing passages bearing on Canadian conditions from the *Report on the Cost of Living* prepared by the State of Massachusetts, he noted that "manual labour has become a reproach. Children are ashamed of the honest occupations of their fathers," and called for increased job training in the productive vocations.<sup>44</sup>

Inflation provided traditionalists like McDougald an opportunity to reassert the validity of conservative moralism, the centrality of work and thrift, the dangers of desire, and the need for prudence and self-restraint.<sup>45</sup> When summarizing the findings of the investigation, McDougald did not ignore evidence that pointed to increases in the gold supply or the stimulative effect of capital investment in forcing prices higher. However, he consistently asserted that the advance of prices was largely the result of "manifold

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>45</sup> see Horowitz, pp. 73-74 for a similar discussion of American attitudes.



forms of extravagance and wastage, public and private."<sup>46</sup> Emphasizing that the "method of living of our so-called plain people was on a higher plane" than ever before, he acknowledged that rising standards of living were evidence of the growing wealth of the country, but continued to insist that the "spirit that has won success is the spirit of duty and work. The lessons of history teach...that a life of ease is not conducive to individual or national well-being." "Wealth," he argued, "comes from production . . . the more a country produces the richer it is."<sup>47</sup> Viewing Canadian society through the lens of traditional values, new comforts and conveniences were extravagances. They remained charges against production rather than possible stimulants to economic growth.

While McDougald emphasized the social causes of rising prices, Coats pointed to the larger economic transformations underway. It was in part for this reason that he insisted that what was needed was a "purely technical report" that would offer a comprehensive account of the facts and investigation of the conditions surrounding the production, distribution and consumption of the commoner necessities. Rises in the cost of living were examined sector by sector. Changes in the standard of living were analysed in detail, revealing that per capita consumption had increased in every category since 1900. Housing conditions had deteriorated for unskilled labourers and most immigrants but improved for other classes. The consumption of luxury goods, from liquor to ribbons and billiard tables, had risen. Literacy rates had improved; the value of imported books, magazines and newspapers had increased by almost three hundred percent in the past fifteen years. Charitable contributions had risen, and the purchase of life insurance policies (regarded as a barometer of savings and thrift) was up by over

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

seventy-five percent. Insofar as increases in expenditure were not confined to luxuries and extravagances, Coats argued "that their origin is not psychological alone, but economic . . . rendered possible in the first instance by increased incomes."<sup>48</sup>

Coats resisted as much as possible suggesting remedies for rising prices. While he agreed that the changes McDougald proposed to encourage food production and reduce wastage would mitigate the effects of high prices, he believed that they did not address the true causes, which were not moral but technical. Rises in wages and prices in advance of actual profits had skewed the balance between supply and demand. Moreover, because standards of consumption varied throughout the nation and indeed from family to family, the process of measuring changes in the cost of living would, he suggested, require a standardised basket of goods and a baseline concept of "enough." Distribution problems had been created by the lessening of the local food supply during an era of heavy expenditure on the capital account. The solution was to shift the economy away from growth driven by capital investment towards a more balanced economy that involved the making and selling of things. In effect, he proposed that orienting the economy toward domestic consumption would reduce prices. Finally, he asserted that an enlarged and reorganised bureau of statistics would be instrumental in avoiding future problems such as over-production. Without such a system of comprehensive and up-to-date measurements, he insisted, it would be "impossible to grasp the significance of current phenomenon" and co-ordinate economic decision-making.

McDougald had situated the investigation of social and economic change in a moral context; Coats strove to remove morality from the discussion by employing

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 1017.

technical methods to document behaviours and measure trends. His goal was not so much to defend as to normalize new consumption patterns. Examining their different responses to rising costs makes clear the competing sets of values involved. McDougald considered the results of the inquiry in the context of a pre-existing moral standard. Coats, on the other hand, had begun to articulate the rationality of managerial culture. The overtly moral interpretation of events offered by McDougald was displaced as bureaucratic modes of thinking "invaded the realm of ethics."<sup>49</sup> Coats privileged systematic knowledge analyzed by professionals in marked contrast to the personal interviews, first hand observations and anecdotal information assembled by McDougald. Objectifying consumer behaviour as a series of spending practices rather than moral decisions supported both the professionalization of government and the normalization of consumer practices.<sup>50</sup>

While Coats was writing the conclusion to the Report of the Board of Inquiry, King had begun to prepare the draft of a book to be titled *Industry and Humanity*. The underlying thought, he explained would be that "the ends of industry must be made subservient to the ends of humanity, not humanity made subservient to industry."<sup>51</sup> Throughout his early career, as a conciliator of industrial disputes, as Minister of Labour, and as a consultant in industrial relations, Mackenzie King sought to by-pass the structural tensions inherent in class relations by, on the one hand, reducing class strife to

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<sup>49</sup> Livingston, pp. 20-21.

<sup>50</sup> Poovey argues that this emphasis on disinterested collection of data should be regarded as a fundamental marker of modernity. Indeed she suggests that it was the tension between first hand observation and systemic knowledge that required a professional or disciplinary solution, that resulted in tasks of knowledge production being handed over to the experts. Poovey, pp. xii-xiv, 3.

<sup>51</sup> F. A. McGregor, *The Fall & Rise of Mackenzie King: 1911-1919* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 216-217.

problems of human relations, and, on the other, by appealing to community and public interest, terms which minimized class conflict by suggesting a greater interest that all members of society shared. Government initiatives such as the *Labour Gazette* and the process of impartial investigation that King advocated as a solution to industrial disputes both relied upon the principles of objective, scientific study. King's enthusiasm for impartial investigation bore a close affinity to both Coats' emphasis on the collection of statistics and the commitment of social reformers to mobilizing public opinion as an instrument of change. "Investigation," King explained, "is a letting in of light ...for it assumes that collective opinion will approve the right, and condemn the wrong. It does not attempt to award punishments or to affix blame; it aims simply at disclosing facts."<sup>52</sup> Once the facts were made clear, conciliation would address "the human element," resolving the personal antipathies that continued to keep disputants apart. American historian James Livingston, who describes King as the man who "invented the 'human relations' brand of industrial psychology," regards this tactic, which effectively separated both private property and labour from the management of the industrial process, as a key step in the managerial revolution that accompanied the emergence of both large-scale industry and consumer culture.<sup>53</sup>

#### **The Managerial State and the Community of Canadian Consumers**

If Coats can be said to have represented the practices of bureaucratic rationality, King can be seen as an advocate of the managerial function. It was the managers, whether in business or in government, who were most aligned with the social good. Insofar as order and stability benefited all classes of society by steadying the supply of goods and

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Livingston, see pp. 94, 100, 328 n18.



services and assuring jobs and increased profit, management was a practical concern, less about power than about administration. While the liberal in King rejected government ownership, he saw a role for state intervention in the economy, not in the management of the business cycle, but as a manager of men mediating between classes.

In his 1906 account of the Lethbridge coal strike, King explained that insofar as "organized society alone makes possible the organization of mines to the mutual benefit of those engaged in the work of production" there were "obligations due society . . . In any civilized community private rights should cease when they become public wrongs."<sup>54</sup> Governments had previously intervened in industrial disputes in the interests of producers and property rights. King did not ignore property rights, but articulated different rationale for government involvement, rooted in the interest of the larger community conceived as a community of consumers. Referencing the essential mutuality of interests that he proposed underlay the industrial order, King saw all parties as fundamentally aligned in their obligation to maintaining production for the benefit of the community. In effect, King proposed that the community's right to consume key goods outweighed the rights associated with production, including both the private rights of capital and the rights of labour. Although its function was to guarantee social progress, the state stood in an administrative role, managing the economy for the benefit of society as a whole and not for the benefit of any one faction. Seen from this perspective, the consumer interest became the comprehensive category that included all Canadians.<sup>55</sup>

King sought to enact these insights in The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act

<sup>54</sup> *Labour Gazette*, December 1906, p. 661.

<sup>55</sup> Coal, King noted, was necessary not only in manufacturing and transportation, but was something that "as the recent experience has shown, much of happiness and life itself depends." *Ibid.*, p. 662.

(1907). This legislation, which King had largely authored, prohibited industrial actions, including both strikes and lockouts during a period of compulsory investigation. Compulsory award was deemed unnecessary. Revealing the results of the investigation to public scrutiny, it was presumed, would provide the incentive necessary for the disputants to resolve their differences. In practice, the information available to the general public was often limited by arbitrators who used their personal skill to negotiate agreements that generally sought to balance labour's needs for a living wage with the prerogatives of property.<sup>56</sup> Behind these differences of theory and practice, however, the legitimacy of government had been linked with the provision of essential goods and services to society as a whole—if not to individuals within it—as a matter of the social good.

*Industry and Humanity* drew upon King's practical experience as a mediator in industrial disputes and his theoretical commitments as a scholar and social reformer. The ideas first articulated during the events of 1906 and developed further on behalf of America's Rockefeller interests after a particularly violent series of strikes that began in 1915, lay at the foundation of his arguments.<sup>57</sup> Disputes between labour and capital were no longer limited to "these two essential parties to production" but had become "a Community problem." The community's access to goods and services was consistently

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<sup>56</sup> In disputes arbitrated by Adam Shortt, for example, the goal was negotiated agreement rather than conciliation. Shortt (the most frequently appointed arbitrator on boards convened under the Industrial Disputes Act) rejected the utility of publicity, fearing that it would force disputants to become entrenched in their positions. His object was not to make a report which public opinion would compel the disputants to accept, but to achieve an agreement and then to report it. Craven, pp. 296, 299-301. Wallace, pp. 124-125.

<sup>57</sup> See Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1960), pp. 159-169 for a useful discussion of King as a professional intellectual, employed by Rockefeller, and responsible for the development of new initiatives in labour relations.

deemed paramount and the parties to a dispute were pressured to resolve their differences in the interest of the public good. King regarded the new industrial order as essentially non-moral.<sup>58</sup> The old abstractions of capital and labour were no longer relevant; social well-being was paramount and obvious if individuals would recognize the impulses, feelings, and aspirations they held in common.<sup>59</sup> Industry, science and management were neither inherently good nor evil, but could be turned toward ends that helped humanity by reducing class conflict and increasing social harmony, abundance and happiness, or to ends that increased social conflict. The ultimate goal of industry was not profit but "the well-being of mankind."<sup>60</sup> The application of management and government to the industrial processes would allow them to better serve "the individual existences" of men, women and children.<sup>61</sup> By recognizing the common interests that men of all classes and of all countries shared, industry "would be made to serve and to save Humanity."

"It is the community," King wrote, "which creates the demand for commodities and services, through which Labour is provided with remunerative employment, and Capital with a return on its investment....it is the Community that makes possible all the activities of Industry and helps to determine their value and scope."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, what all the different parties to industrial process receive as their reward "is in reality so much purchasing power wherewith to obtain commodities and services." Industry, therefore, should no longer be thought of as merely a revenue producing process, but as a social

<sup>58</sup> Mackenzie King, *Industry and Humanity*, p. ix.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

service of the highest kind.<sup>63</sup> Consumption united the disparate members of society into a community; it was "the arena within which a people share a common interest." Insofar as "smoothing" relations of production would steady the supply of goods and services, consumption served as the point of entry for expanded government responsibility.

Consumption, however, was not merely an entitlement. As individuals consumers had the potential to act rationally and "a special responsibility . . . to see that fair and just standards" were maintained in Industry. Purchasing power, King wrote, was "not a power limited to obtaining commodities; it is power which extends to controlling conditions under which commodities are produced and services rendered." Consumer's leagues and white label campaigns were cited as vehicles through which consumers could exercise their responsibilities as members of the Community to secure the welfare of working people.<sup>64</sup> King did not favour direct government intervention in the economy; however,

<sup>63</sup> W. L. Mackenzie King, "The Four Parties to Industry," Address before The Empire Club of Canada, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1919, p. 31-32.

<sup>64</sup> Mackenzie King, *Industry and Humanity*, p. 308 ff. King refers to American examples in the footnote to the text. A branch of the Consumers' League existed in Calgary for some years. Speakers from Calgary were quoted in the national press; however, the movement does not seem to have spread to other Canadian cities. The origins of the Calgary Consumers' League are linked directly to rising prices of 1913, see *Grain Growers Guide*, Dec. 3, 1913, p. 10. Articles in *The Globe*, Sat. July 7, 1917, p. 10 and *Toronto Star*, Wed., Sept. 19, 1917, p. 13 continue to discuss this as a local Calgary organization. Women's Institutes were widespread and advocated for good consumer practices but tended to connect these with home economics, that is, with shopping and housekeeping practices rather than political activism. Canadian manufacturers and producers had called upon consumers to "Buy Canadian" for many years. However, there is less evidence that unions called upon Canadians to buy union goods along the lines King was suggesting. In short, consumer activism does not seem to have been politicized in Canada to the degree that it was in American during the same period. This being said, the subject awaits further study. See discussions of consumer activism in David Bright, "Bonds of Brotherhood" M. A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1990, pp. 122-128, in Ruth Frager, "Politicized Housewives in the Jewish Communist Movement of Toronto, 1923-1933" in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (ed), *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); and Joan



he believed that consumers, if provided with the education and information needed to identify abuse, fraud and deception, could make choices that would contribute to the progress of society. Good citizenship was linked with good consumer practices.

King argued that the organization of industry on a large scale under scientific management had fundamentally altered relations of production, vastly increasing the material wealth of society with a gradual lessening of human effort.<sup>65</sup> Goods were cheaper and more plentiful than ever before. Standards of living were rising. Industry, he argued, did not affect wage earners "merely as persons possessing labour which they dispose of." For most men and women, "the conditions which surround Industry, and the output of Industry, represent all that is possible for them in the way of health, happiness, and life itself."<sup>66</sup> Consumption, together with the day-to-day conditions of the workplace, framed the parameters of life's experience.

King hoped that acceptance of the principles of investigation would resolve ongoing conflicts between capital and labour, marking "the dawn of a new era in . . . which material production would be vastly increased and life and happiness abound."<sup>67</sup> United for high purpose, Labour and Capital were capable of a vastly increased social service. They would, King predicted, "bring to a disconsolate and broken hearted world the one hope that is theirs alone to bring... the promise of . . . resurrection to a more

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Sangster, "Consuming Issues: Women on the Left, Political Protests, and the Organization of Homemakers, 1920-1960," in S. A. Cook, L. R. McLean, and K. O'Rourke (ed), *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 78.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.

abundant life."<sup>68</sup> Continually increasing rates of consumption were not the basis of a strong economy, but the reward for co-operation and sound management.

### Conclusions

"The fundamental tendency of all bureaucratic thought" Karl Mannheim has observed is "to turn all problems of politics into problems of administration."<sup>69</sup> In effect, during this period two related problems emerged. Firstly, the process by which the majority of Canadians obtained basic subsistence was rapidly changing. Secondly, as productivity increased, the struggle over the distribution of rising profits and surplus goods intensified. The government's response was to investigate, to measure and to categorise, and in this way to identify and stabilize new patterns. Reports prepared by the Department of Labour and the Board of Inquiry were part of an extended effort to measure new patterns of living and bring them under government control. As data was collected, tabulated and charted individual purchases were aggregated into collective practices. The process of enumeration created the illusion of value free practices and was a critical step in the development of the abstractions of consumerism. The use of such terms, including "the consumer," "the cost of living," "the standard of living," and "a basket of goods," began to gradually free consumption of many of its pejorative connotations. Moreover, as new trends attained objective reality it became possible, in theory at least, to manage them.

The state assumed an expanded role, but it was also true that the people called for government to become involved, effectively empowering the bureaucracy to investigate and regulate at least some aspects of these changes. McDougald, Coats and King were

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.

<sup>69</sup> Mannheim, pp. 118-119.

among those who called for more government, whether in the form of an enlarged bureau of statistics, the systematic management of human relations, or the improved regulation of consumer goods, labelling and packaging. Increasingly they also called for the government to become involved in the education of consumers, emphasising the need for individuals to take on a measure of responsibility for their purchasing habits. The role of the consumer in the larger economy, however, remained in dispute. Few were willing, as yet, to consider consumers as a significant force capable of driving economic growth, and fewer still considered increased consumption rather than increased production as the appropriate ends of industry. Coats and King made particular effort to de-emphasize relations of production, and to articulate consumption as a community or public interest relevant to all Canadians. They provided positive interpretations of consumption that connected consumer practices with participation in society, making explicit the association between material well-being and citizenship.

The state maintains its legitimacy, among other means, by establishing definitions of equity and community able to capture widespread allegiance.<sup>70</sup> During this period, when citizenship became linked with consumption and Canadians came increasingly to be seen as consumers of goods, the role of government expanded to include the measuring and monitoring of consumption. New techniques and new mandates extended the reach of the state. Its task was not yet to ensure consumption, but clearly a new pattern of emphasis had emerged which had the potential to capture wider loyalties.

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<sup>70</sup> Craven, p. 353.

## 6. Culturing Canada

Those early pioneering days of our fathers ought to be an inspiration to us. They lived very close to Nature, and were hard-working, God-fearing men and women. They were happy, too, in their little log shanties. Of amusements, as we know them today, there were practically none. . . I hope that no great building up of the cities, no in rush of immigration, will tear the roots of this country from the things that are real, primitive and elementary. . .

Our fathers did not write their history. They were too busy bringing vast tracts of country under civilization's sway. I hope to see it written some day. . . [with] all the finer meanings brought out for the culturing of today's patriotism.<sup>1</sup>

Rev. R. P. Bowles, Chancellor, Victoria University, *The Empire Club of Canada*, 1924.

Praising the pioneer experience to a luncheon meeting of Canada's business elite, Bowles called upon the nation's cultural makers to write stories that would celebrate the example of those who were too busy to write stories themselves. Bowles' address offers insight into many of the themes and practices that were becoming central to the discussion of culture in the interwar years. The "real" Canada, he explained, was not to be found in the room amongst the powerful men and women shaping the nation in the present or even in the streets of the city beyond the walls of the Royal York Hotel, but in the pioneer past. Immeasurable toil, proximity to nature, and a primitive way of life felt in some way more genuine than the present day whirl of urban life and immigrants.

While Bowles mentioned only peripherally the economics of modern industry, mass production and mass consumption, the sphere of "real" culture he valued gained significance in this context. As capital reconfigured mass culture, giving greater economic and social prominence to choices of ordinary Canadians, consumption

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. R. P. Bowles, "Culturing Canadian Patriotism," *The Empire Club of Canada Speeches*, 1924 (Toronto: The Empire Club 1924).



practices came to be seen as both a potential source of national unity and as a marker of social difference. Descriptive categories such as "real" and "elementary" used by Bowles took on meaning not from the properties inherent in the wilderness or pioneer life but in the process of definition by which their character and qualities are established. "Folk" has no meaning without modern. Authenticity requires its antithesis "the inauthentic." Genuine exists only in distinction to a baser counterpart against which its merits can be measured and judged.<sup>2</sup> Longing for the past speaks of the transformations taking place in the present.<sup>3</sup>

The interwar period saw cultural practices and understandings reworked in response to Canada's changing political and economic circumstances. Tremendous variation remained in the extent to which Canadians were able to participate in the mass consumer market, but mass produced goods were available in unprecedented quantities. In many sectors, including manufacturing and wheat production, war needs had encouraged the rapid penetration of mechanization and modern management techniques. Unemployment virtually disappeared by mid-war as a result of both military recruitment and the quickening of the industrial economy. Although inflation rose, wage packets grew slightly faster and living standards improved.<sup>4</sup> It was widely accepted that

<sup>2</sup> Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (ed), *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 19, and Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> The "lurching uneven movements of modernity," communication theorist Kim Sawchuk writes, have changed our lived relations of space-time. Within the experience of modernity there is a longing for a past before "time-consciousness," connected to a natural order when things did not move quite so fast, and for face-to-face communication in a highly mediated age. Kim Sawchuk, "Modernity, Nostalgia, and the Standardization of Time," in Lynda Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Heron (ed), *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto: University of

Canadians were consumers; at issue was what they would consume. Insofar as increasing abundance in the form of mass consumption held out the prospect of "a world beyond menialities,"<sup>5</sup> cultural elites identified in mass consumption a threat to their authority and their values.<sup>6</sup> Mass consumption (the purchase of standardized, brand-name goods, aimed at as broad a buying public as possible) came to symbolize the working and the lower middle classes. Resistance to mass consumption (that is, to consumption in its mass aspects although not to increases in consumption per se), became the marker of the upper middle class and, most particularly, of the intellectual and cultural elite. Elites did not deny the increasing centrality of consumption. They did, however, oppose the intrusion of mass consumption into the field of culture. Seeking to define national culture as something different than the practices working class and middle class

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Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 18-19, K. Norrie and D. O'ram, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1998), pp. 298-315, Benedict Anderson, "Staging Antimodernism in the Age of High Capitalist Nationalism," in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Burton, "The Ten-Minus Nine Economics," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. IX, No. 101, February 1929, p.160.

<sup>6</sup> Resistance to mass consumption was a common feature of intellectual practice during the interwar period. In Britain, for example, F. R. Leavis reshaped the study of literature into a critique of mass society, calling upon the educated elite to preserve aesthetic and moral values against the threat of cultural decline. The division between idealized high culture and the anarchy of modern commercial society was heightened by contrast with a romanticized vision of pre-mechanized England, where craftsmen took pride in their work and pleasure in their surroundings, and possessed a "dignified notion" of their place in the community. German intellectuals similarly despaired of the superficiality of mass culture. While Leavis believed that the tradition of culture could be preserved and transmitted by a discerning minority, the members of Germany's Frankfurt School of social critics saw no such comfort. Associating the development of mass culture and particularly of the culture industries with the process of scientific and rational control implicated the Enlightenment in the process of decline. Other German thinkers, notably the philosopher Martin Heidegger, continued to hope that renewal of the nation might originate in the organic ties of land, language and *volk*. Characteristically in these discussions intellectuals of both left and right emphasized mass consumption as both the principle symptom and the cause of society's disintegration.

Canadians had begun to embrace, Canada's artistic and intellectual elites offered alternatives that often remained commercial but oriented away from popular taste.

The first theme in Bowles' address was its obvious anti-modernism. In the field of cultural history, the term anti-modernism is used to refer to the pervasive sense of loss that often co-existed in the decades around the turn of the century alongside an enthusiasm for modernization and material progress.<sup>7</sup> The quest for the authentic, the genuine and the first hand experience emerged in dialectic with commercial society as a form of cultural protest. To be against modernity in Canada in the twenties was to reject the disciplines of the market that increasingly constrained professional and daily life. On the other hand, it was a form of protest that easily co-existed with and indeed largely sought resolution through commodity capitalism.

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<sup>7</sup> The term antimodernism is useful but in itself lacks precision. As American historian T. Jackson Lears explains, it is "not very helpful simply to describe antimodern dissent as a 'reaction' against modernizing tendencies. There were many such reactions: in each case, we need to know who was reacting, in what ways, and why." Investigating American culture at the end of the nineteenth century, Lears defines antimodernism as recoil from the over-civilized and the search for intense experiences, whether spiritual or physical, that seemed a lost possibility in an increasingly organized, bureaucratized, and urbanized world. Lears links antimodernism with the reaction to secularization. This theme was less central in Canada in the 1920s, where the sense of dislocation was particularly associated with the lived experiences of industrial capitalism and institutional independence from Britain. Canadian historian Ian McKay discusses antimodernism in the context of an interwar era marked by "great refusals of capitalism's 'disenchantment of the world'" and the individualistic search for something more authentic, real and essential that carried the possibility of re-enchantment. Both historians note that the importance placed on authentic experience in distinction to the mass culture was a form of protest that paradoxically helped to facilitate the transition to a consumer orientation. Of interest to this dissertation is the relationship in Canada between the discourse of antimodernism and the advance of mass consumption, a discourse structured so that national culture becomes associated with antimodernism while the emerging culture of mass consumption is cast as unCanadian by the country's dominant social groups. T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace, Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. xiv-xv, 48. Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994), pp. xv, 37.



The second theme, running in parallel with the first, was the call for nationalism.

Since before the turn of the century, the intellectual community had been concerned with the relationship between changes in consumption and the social order, whether seen by conservatives as corrosive of producer values such as thrift, hard work, and self-discipline or by progressives as a possible solution to social strife. During the war, those most optimistic about the productive power of modern industry had begun to link access to basic material goods by the broad mass of ordinary Canadians with the responsibilities of government. War increased the state's involvement in the economy and in the private lives of Canadians. At the same time, the parameters of citizenship were also called into question by debates that surrounded a series of difficult decisions: conscription was imposed over the objections of many in Quebec; women were enfranchised while recent immigrants from enemy nations were disenfranchised; personal income and corporate taxes were introduced for the first time.

The call to produce a post-colonial national culture can be seen as another in a series of cultural manoeuvres, necessary to bind Canadians together into a common community and to legitimize the expansion of the state and its intrusion into the private lives of citizens.<sup>8</sup> The discourse of authenticity, chosen to discredit mass consumption and garner support for the preferences of cultural elites, also served the goals of post-colonial nationalism. References to the hardship of settlement, for example, also emphasized the founding of a nation separate from Britain. In a similar way, the Group of Seven's celebration of the grandeur of the untouched wilderness served to mark Canada as decisively different while at the same time offering an antidote to the

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 98.



perceived ills and artificiality of contemporary life.<sup>9</sup> The language of patriotism favours idioms that "denote something to which one is naturally tied."<sup>10</sup> In these "natural ties," political theorist Benedict Anderson explains, "one senses what one might call 'the beauty of *gemeinschaft*.'" Because symbols such as the land and the folk have the appearance of timelessness, they seem un-chosen. The intervention of the cultural producer is not obvious. By investing select cultural commodities with the authority of the "real" Canada, elite groups could more effectively establish their tastes as the yardstick of reality and claim their vision as the essence of Canada. In effect, anti-modernism and nationalism were informed by the same cultural logic. Both defined the sphere of true or authentic culture as the opposite of mass consumption and the processes of the marketplace.

In the cultural discourse of the post-war decade, national culture and mass culture emerged as another socially constituted binary, both mutually dependent and mutually exclusive. Locating the true spirit of Canada in the pioneer past, the wilderness, the Maritime Folk, the Quebecois peasant, or the small town denied the value, if not the reality of modernity, masses and cities. Associating inauthenticity with the consumption of new mass-made store bought goods and authenticity with the homemade, denied and devalued the practices and experiences of an increasing majority of Canadians and occluded most discussion of contemporary social strife. While both mass and official culture circulated in an increasingly market oriented economy, the realm of high or authentic culture repressed its own commercial involvements. Elite culture was understood as outside of the market, regardless of its considerable commercial

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, p. 131.

involvements. The benefits cultural makers received from the commercial appeal of anti-commercialism were ignored.<sup>11</sup> Even the role of business leaders in the remaking of Canada and the considerable economic benefits they reaped by doing so, went largely undiscussed in the context of cultural change. Instead, the discourse of authenticity divided consumers into opposing camps distinguished by their commitment to culture or commodities. In both cases it was consumption and the appreciation of goods rather than their usefulness that was critical. Bowles did not call upon his audience to become pioneers but rather to write and read the stories of an older, simpler way of life. As the decade unfolded, the understanding of the political and civic significance of consumption was increasingly dichotomized. Pre-modern producerist values were regarded as the basis of national identity, while mass culture was stigmatized as a homogenizing force with a corrosive effect on intellectual and aesthetic standards. In this discussion "nation" was not a political category but a consumer category.

### **The Separation of Production and Consumption**

Before the turn of the century, cultural experiences, both high and low, took place for the most part in localized and relatively intimate settings. The roles of producer and consumer were fluid rather than fixed and the exchange of money played less part. After the turn of the century, culture was increasingly reconstructed within the realm of

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<sup>11</sup> T. Jackson Lears frequently observed that those who embraced anti-modern aesthetics were often among the chief beneficiaries of modern enterprise. T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace, Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). See also the discussion in Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 14-16. Donald A. Wright has also touched on this theme in "W. D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880's-1918," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 1997, noting the cultivation of pre-modern aesthetics by the scions of two of the Montreal's wealthiest families.

commodity relations. A process of differentiation and specialization very similar to that which had already occurred in manufacturing industries transformed the production of culture as Canadians became less involved in making and exchanging certain kinds of experiences and instead began to buy them. Producers and consumers were separated by time, space and often by different areas of expertise.

In *Making Culture* Maria Tippet explores the professionalization of artistic production in Canada during this critical period.<sup>12</sup> Evidence from memoirs and novels, already "rose-tinted," described the late nineteenth century as a time when "everybody sang" if not always in the same key.<sup>13</sup> English speaking Canadians of the business, professional and upper classes "met in one another's homes at regular intervals to make music, read poetry, put on plays, [or] share a model for sketching," striving to achieve Mathew Arnold's dictum of "getting to know the best that has been thought and said in the world." Middle class Canadians described themselves as similarly occupied, although the emphasis, Tippet suggests was less self-fulfillment and mutual entertainment than the camaraderie of shared purposes and social and personal uplift. Life before the turn of the century was remembered as a time non-commercialized, mutual entertainment with performances aimed at an audience of peers. With few exceptions, social and economic issues were not addressed in the artistic productions of the upper and middle classes or by the professional artists who served them.<sup>14</sup> The goal was to uphold existing standards, to cultivate the familiar and the accepted, and to ensure the high moral content of cultural

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<sup>12</sup> Maria Tippet, *Making Culture: English Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> This description was offered by Canadian novelist and CPR publicist Robert Stead and is cited in Tippet, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

production. Moneymaking was generally regarded as inconsistent with these higher purposes of perfection, beauty, morality, community service and spiritual fulfillment.

These traditional patterns of activity did not end abruptly; however, different alignments of interest gradually begin to assert themselves. In a growing economy there were increased opportunities to make money from the practice of art. The publication and circulation of periodicals and books expanded; so did the number of upper middle class and newly rich Canadians interested in culture to naturalize their claims to higher status. The amateur practices of mutual entertainment, where the roles of producer and consumer were interchangeable, gave way to those of increasing specialization with a stricter division between roles. Art makers become aware of their common interests and organized to promote them. While amateur efforts certainly did not disappear in the twentieth century, they lost their central role in the making of culture, which was increasingly organized as an exchange between producers and consumers. The professionalization of high cultural production should be seen as a special instance of larger trends that saw knowledge and the production of knowledge institutionalized and commodified in fields which by tradition had been the realm of the amateur and the general intellectual.<sup>15</sup>

The commodification of cultural practices evident in upper and middle class

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186. The "drive for organization, distinction, and recognition" transformed many fields in this period. Social reformers professionalized their activities, shifting their practice from voluntary to paid work, affiliating themselves with accredited institutions and fortifying their claims to scientific status by the production of a standardized body of knowledge. Canada's universities, under pressure to make knowledge useful, expanded and reorganized curriculum into multi-faculty structures. As an increasingly utilitarian orientation displaced the idea of the university as a centre of moral guidance and classical learning, the general intellectual gave way to the academic specialist. O'ram, *The Government Generation*, p. 122 ff.



society was equally pronounced in working class life. Prior to the turn of the century, working class leisure was also described as a shared activity, rooted in the physical proximity and common interests of the factory floor, the union hall and the working class neighborhood. Lines between workplace and recreational association were blurred. Many activities, such as Labour Day parades, referenced both leisure-time and labour. By the 1920s, however, the bonds of working class unity rooted in "lives shared both on and off the jobs" began gradually to dissolve.<sup>16</sup> Rising levels of literacy, reduced hours of work, and modest gains in disposable income increased the demand for reading materials. Changes in the technology and economics of the publishing industry encouraged the growth of daily papers, pulp journals and mass magazines. In the urban centers and even in the smaller towns, mass media, professional sports, the cinema, and the radio steadily displaced older forms of cultural practice.<sup>17</sup> The transformation of traditional culture, and

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<sup>16</sup> Trends in wages were far from consistent, but generally indicate improved purchasing power. In 1929 it was possible, for the first time, for the average male manufacturing worker to raise a family on his wages alone. However, considerable numbers of Canadians were far from living the good life. In 1929 a family of four needed an estimated \$1,200 to \$1,500 to survive in minimum comfort, but sixty percent of Canadian working men and eighty-two percent of labouring women earned less than \$1,000 years. Modest gains in wages matched trends in consumption. Purchases of cars, radios, household appliances, furnishings and homes all increased in this decade. Almost one in seven Canadians over the age of fourteen owned a car by 1930. Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), pp. 232-233.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan Palmer discusses the expansion of mass culture as the economic appropriation of the cultural realm and its incorporation into capital's expanding and acquisitive hold over all aspects of life. Canada's intellectual and cultural community were reacting to the initial stages of this change in Canada, however they were acutely aware that the "regime" of higher wages, mass production, increased leisure time and mass culture were significantly more advanced in America and parts of Europe. As traditional values were displaced by "a range of activities that redefined the nature and meaning of time away from work," Canada's cultural elites protested, campaigning for a national alternative that supported their own values and social position. Against the diffusion of commercialized mass culture that falsely (according to Palmer) enhanced the ideological message of a

particularly the penetration of American culture, was rapid and significant.<sup>18</sup>

Daily papers were redesigned with larger photos, bolder type and increased coverage of sports, crime and celebrities. Columns on bridge, hobbies, auto repair, personal advice and, most popular of all, comic strips appeared, all distributed by American newspaper syndicates. From the point of view of "highbrow" authors, the expansion of the reading public was problematic. Insofar as the audience was fragmented by reading ability, interest and gender, quality publications represented a diminishing percentage of the whole.

While there were fewer than 10,000 radio sets in use in 1923, 297,000 Canadians were paying the annual one-dollar license fee by 1929. Most were tuned to American stations, which offered both superior transmission power and superior production values. Canadian periodicals flourished in the 1920s, but subscriptions to American magazines increased as well, reaching the fifty million mark by 1926. Club memberships flourished; however, for every active member of the Canadians Club, two others attended weekly meetings of the Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis and Gyro clubs, which had expanded rapidly into all regions of Canada during the twenties. By 1929, 1,100 movie theaters were selling two million tickets a week.<sup>19</sup> On Saturday night, when lodges, church basements, and rural schools joined urban movie houses in showing films, over a million Canadians sat

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pluralistic and classless society, artistic and intellectual elites offered uninhabited wilderness landscapes and pre-modern communities. Appealing to producerist values, they used the rhetoric of antimodernism and nationalism to devalue mass culture. In both cases, the powerful tried to set an agenda that would serve their own interests. Bryan Palmer, pp. 230-232, 235.

<sup>18</sup> This description and the following paragraph draw upon John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939, Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), pp. 175-186, and Palmer, pp. 230-235.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson and Seager, p. 176.

in darkened halls, watching mostly made-in-Hollywood movies. The expansion of professional sport was equally dramatic.

To what degree did mass culture transform working-class lives and to what degree was it possible to resist and remake mass culture? Certainly many collective practices were transformed or eroded by commercial forms of leisure, many of which turned on purchase and private use rather than community participation. With more disposable income, middle class families were no doubt even more strongly affected. While many Canadians embraced the opportunities presented by the market, elites reacted strongly and negatively to the commercialization of popular culture while repressing or refusing to acknowledge similar shifts in their own practices. Seeing their values marginalized by other sources of information (advertisements, how-to books, department store displays, the cinema), they moved to protect their social position, shifting the basis of their social authority from moral to cultural criteria. High culture, not longer self-sustaining and separate, became conscious of mass culture and of itself.

### **Making National Culture**

It became something of a point of national pride that in the post-war period Canada's intelligentsia experienced neither the disillusionment suffered by their British equivalents nor the cynicism of the Americans.<sup>20</sup> Plagued only by "a guilty feeling that Canada was as yet unwritten, unpainted, unsung,"<sup>21</sup> the creative community was eager to construct the myths and symbols of nationhood. It is the case, however, that even if the tone of the Canadian discussion was distinctively optimistic and forward looking, the themes were those which preoccupied the intellectual and cultural elites of many nations

<sup>20</sup> John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, p. 161.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158. The quotation is attributed to Group of Seven artist Arthur Lismer.

during this time. Intellectual culture in the inter-war period was distinguished by, as Ian McKay has expressed it, "great refusals of capitalism's 'disenchantment' of the world," manifested in the search for authentic experiences, untainted pasts and uninhabited landscapes.<sup>22</sup>

The search for the essence of the nation turned on the contrast between authentic culture and culture that was mass produced and mass consumed. Viewed from the perspective of an emerging consumer orientation, the rise of Canadian nationalism in the 1920s can be associated less with the crucible of wartime experience and the desire to "shake off the fetters of colonial subservience," and more with the reaction to the social and cultural changes associated with the transition to modern corporate capitalism. The concerns of high culture (that is, poetry, prose, painting and the state-sponsored production of documentary films) were those of nation building; however, the logic of nationalism and the logic of anti-modernism led to many of the same cultural choices.<sup>23</sup>

Those advocating anti-modern experiences did not embrace primitive lives—except perhaps on weekends and holidays—but rather worked within the consumer economy. The discourse of anti-modernism in Canada can be more usefully understood not as unilaterally anti-modern, but as rejecting consumption in its mass aspects.<sup>24</sup> Examined in the larger context of western cultural discussion, it is clear that

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Ian McKay, "Handicrafts and the Logic of 'Commercial Antimodernism,'" in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 117.

<sup>24</sup> In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), Walter Benjamin distinguished between authentic art (produced in the context of ritual and tradition) and mass culture (produced by means of mechanical reproduction). The difference was not so much the technical form of production (hand-made versus machine-made) but in the reception or consumption of art that has been "emancipated" from its origins by the process of reproduction and distribution. In the discussion of



the distinction between standards (an attribute of high culture) and standardization (an attribute of mass culture) were not unique to Canada. Nor were conclusions that reaffirmed elite status and stigmatized working-class leisure time pursuits.<sup>25</sup>

### New Journals

By the 1920s the role of the intellectual as arbiter and advocate of high culture was being challenged by the dynamics of mass production and mass consumption which set volume of sales as the measure of success in place of standards of judgment. Cultural elites responded by organizing to forge own community and to advance their own interests. The formalization and institutionalization of relationships among members of Canada's intellectual and artistic elite during the inter-war years has been well studied.<sup>26</sup> The creative artist, the writers, the university professors shared a preoccupation with the development of a Canadian culture that would provide the "spiritual cement" of national

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antimodernism, inauthenticity was linked to the production of goods for profit in external markets rather than for use by the producers themselves. Christopher Steiner, "Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Servility," in Phillips and Steiner, p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> Lynda Jessup has usefully noted the reluctance to see the Canadian experience in relation to broader trends in the history of culture in the West perpetuates the self-fulfilling claims that our culture is "distinctively Canadian." Apart from the fact that it "smacks of parochialism," it ignores the degree to which work like that of the Group of Seven was affected by the restructuring of Western society in a manner similar to that of their counterparts on both sides of the Atlantic during these years and helped to reformulate the cultural authority of the nation's Anglo-Canadians elites. Lynda Jessup, "Bushwhackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> Vipond proposes that elites organized themselves to recreate a pre-war sense of comradeship and to extend their influence among those who mattered. The interpretation offered here is not meant to challenge but to extend this understanding, exploring the development of the journals in the context, not only of elite culture, but also in tension with mass consumption. Mary Vipond, "Nationalism in the 20s" in J. M. Bumstêd (ed), *Interpreting Canada's Past: Vol. II, After Confederation, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, (Toronto: Oxford, 1993).

will and purpose.<sup>27</sup> Molding the minds of the leaders and future leaders of Canadian society, they built associations that served, in addition to nationalist goals, to bolster social status and foster feelings of cohesion, community and common purpose. These efforts involved, in addition to the formation of new national organizations, the creation of new journals. The bonds of cultural consumption would supplement the bonds of cultural production, enlarging the circle of support for intellectual and artistic effort. From a more purely economic point of view, those striving to assert a new role for themselves as the makers of a specifically Canadian culture understood the need to create a market for that culture that would be economically viable but also distinct from the mass market.

The editorials introducing these new journals commonly noted that this was an age with too many publications and too little time. More books and journals were being published than ever before, however many intellectuals believed that the quality of the public press had declined as quantity rose. The idea of a review, mocked by Bourinot prior to the turn of the century as offering only "predigested" thoughts, came to be regarded as a useful social tool. *The Dalhousie Review* (1919), for example, offered itself as a "guide to the most significant literature" for those whose time for reading was limited. The editor assured readers that in the *Dalhousie Review*, the "ever increasing mass of books issuing from the press" would be "sifted by critics for those who have little leisure to sift for themselves."<sup>28</sup> The *Canadian Historical Review* (1920) linked its decision to begin quarterly publication to the increasing volume of historical publications,

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>28</sup> "Salutation," *Dalhousie Review*, Volume 1, No. 1, April 1921, p. 3.

too many to authoritatively review in a single annual issue.<sup>29</sup>

Discussions of the vast quantity of published material available for review raised the problem of selection. *Dalhousie Review* promised to avoid the pitfalls of both the overly technical journal and merely literary entertainments. Developments in literature, science and art would be discussed according to universal standards, while social problems would be examined in the context of local conditions. Serious thinking, higher purpose and insights that impart "breadth of interest" and "balance of judgment" were mentioned as guiding ideals. Many of the contributors to the inaugural issue of the *Canadian Bookman* (1919) similarly discussed the need for a publication that would, as the Very Reverend Llwyd put it, "guide the Canadian mind to a wise selection from among the myriad publications which invite attention."<sup>30</sup> The Premier of Ontario echoed this theme, asking "What mortal man can hope to be familiar with a realm so vast and unbounded?" He proposed that it was "the duty of the book-wise to educate the popular taste to a due appreciation of what is highest and best."<sup>31</sup> William Peterson, Principal of McGill University, questioned "What is the use of teaching children the mechanical act of reading, if we fail to instill in their minds a genuine appetite for good sound books?"<sup>32</sup>

The need for critical standards was addressed at length in *The Canadian Bookman*, probably because this was the most commercially oriented of the new cultural

<sup>29</sup> *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, March 1920, p. 1. Other relevant titles included the League of Nation's *Bulletin* (1921) and the *Canadian Nation* (reorganized in 1925 by the Association of Canadian Clubs).

<sup>30</sup> Very Reverend Llwyd, "Good Books the Bulwark of Democracy," *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 1, January 1919, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> William Hearst, "Literature as a Force in Canadian Development," *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 1, January 1919, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Sir William Peterson, "The Appetite for Books," *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 1, January 1919, p. 5.

publications, but also because the nature of books—both commodity and culture—made it particularly important to clarify the journal's critical stance. The first object of the *Canadian Bookman*, editor B. K. Sandwell explained, "was to stimulate and encourage the efforts of Canadian writers trying to express Canada to Canadians." Each book would be judged on its own merits, according to the task its author had set himself and the amount of assistance which he had received from his literary predecessors. The high standards editors like Sandwell pledged to follow were invariably contrasted with the cacophony of mass culture. In the pages of the *Canadian Bookman*, for example, it was argued that books would have the opportunity to battle their principle rivals for the time and attention: the player-piano, the phonograph, the moving picture and the publicity experts who aggressively promoted them.<sup>33</sup>

The distinction made between ideas and commodities paralleled that made between literature and mass market publications, which were described as subversive of Canadian morals and values, Canadian industry, and Canadian nationalism. Calling for increased "Bookishness," Sandwell condemned the merely sentimental, idea-less books which "formed the literary food" of too many Canadians.<sup>34</sup> It was a "new era" Sandwell insisted, "an era of ideas."<sup>35</sup> Books should not be regarded "as masses of paper and binding, nor as so many square inches of type nor as speculative adventures in search for 'best-sellers', but as vessels for the containing of and imparting of ideas." The dichotomy between literature and mass market commodity was made clear by Thomas McGarry, the Provincial Treasurer of Ontario, who dramatically suggested that "the

<sup>33</sup> B. K. Sandwell, "Bookishness in Canada," *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 1, Jan. 1919.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> B. K. Sandwell, "The New Era," *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 1, Jan. 1919.



increase of crime and insanity in our midst" might be linked to the effects of "cheap magazines that blunt our finer feelings and thus cause vulgarity and coarseness."<sup>36</sup>

People "who in their idle and receptive hours consume . . . emotional and lurid stuff as the majority of magazines contain" were morally at risk, having become "so depraved that they will not appreciate the higher things even when thrust upon them."<sup>37</sup>

Intellectuals frequently described the reading of periodical literature as an addiction rather than a free choice. "The great bulk of the 'literature' which comes into this country in periodical form," the *Canadian Bookman* told its readers, "is not only useless, it is destructive—as a narcotic is destructive to the mental energies of the taker."<sup>38</sup>

The first act of "making culture," to borrow Tippet's expression, was to make the distinction between mass consumption and the acquisition of culture; the second required the creation of a social space for the circulation of ideas that was ostensibly separate from the market.<sup>39</sup> In spite of their limited subscription lists, these publications saw themselves as constructing a community of writers and readers, creating in effect, a Habermasian public sphere devoted to the discussion of culture and current events.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the mindless, addicted reader of mass literature, the readers of intellectual and culturally oriented journals were seen as engaged and alert, participatory rather than passive,

<sup>36</sup> T. McGarry, "'Cheap Magazines, Crime and Insanity,' *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 1, January 1919, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> B. K. Sandwell, "Free Trade in Debasing Literature," *Canadian Bookman*, Vol. I, No. 2, April 1919, p. 9. For other examples of the use of the term narcotic in reference to mass market publications see "The New Era," *Canadian Bookman*, January 1919; *Canadian Forum*, December 1921, p. 31, Marcus Adeney, "The Community Spirit," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. VIII, No. 85, October 1927, p. 427.

<sup>39</sup> This interpretation draws on Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 (1), 2002, pp. 55-63.

<sup>40</sup> By the end of the decade, *Dalhousie Review* had 500 subscribers, *Canadian Bookman* had 1,800, and *Canadian Forum* had 2500. Vipond, pp. 451, 454, 456.

thoughtful, responsive and at least potentially articulate. The distinction may have been to some extent artificial; however, the production, distribution and consumption of intellectual and cultural journals was conceived of as markedly different than the processes involved in the production, circulation and consumption of cheap novels, short stories, and the advertisement-filled daily press. Journals required a commitment of time. The subject matter was seen to be of lasting significance. The experience of reading journals with intellectual and artist aspirations was envisioned as very different than the experience of reading mass market publications, which were understood to require less attention, to date quickly, and were meant to be replaced rather than cherished.<sup>41</sup>

The intellectual journals of the twenties made a point of inviting contributions from readers. *Dalhousie Review* presented itself as a forum for the discussion of important ideas. The journal would be a vehicle by which scholars, teachers and men of affairs could "speak to a wide audience upon the things of supreme consequence." Promising that "a channel of expression is opened for anyone who has an opportune comment to make upon the affairs of the day," the editor described the magazine's "project" as one of university extension, "rendered to no restricted class but to the people

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<sup>41</sup> This contrasts with the ritual of reading the daily paper that Benedict Anderson regards as central in the formation of modern national cultures. Insofar as the daily press was seen as degraded (sensational, directed to larger audiences and hence, it was believed, to the lowest common denominator, without informed discussion of meaningful events), Canada's intellectual community saw an obvious need for alternative ways of imagining community. Anderson highlights the coming into being through print capitalism of a national consciousness visibly rooted in the rituals of everyday life, creating "community in anonymity." The new journals of the twenties tried to effect different national community, distinguished from the mass. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), pp. 39-40. See also interesting essay by Laura Wexler on the absence of women and in Anderson's essay and the role of illustrations in the daily press. Laura Wexler, "Techniques of the Imaginary Nation," in Ardis Cameron (ed), *Looking for America: The Visual Production of Nation and People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

as a whole." The title of the *Canadian Forum* was in itself suggestive. The editors elaborated further by explaining that the magazine, which described itself as a "monthly journal of opinion," had its origins in a desire to secure a freer and more informal discussion of public questions. Comparing the manufacture of ideas with the products of industry, the editors announced their intention to be part of the 'Made in Canada' movement, asserting, "No country has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home, but not its faith and its philosophy."<sup>42</sup> Deploying the rhetoric of production to distinguish the journal from the mass media, editors assured readers that at least one page would be set aside in each issue for their contributions. The *Canadian Bookman* similarly promised a forum that would bring producers and consumers together into "a more sympathetic and understanding relationship" that would serve, not only to promote books, but also to make and strengthen the Canadian nation.<sup>43</sup> The *Canadian Historical Review* went even further, asserting that it had "no editorial opinions" and that its object "was merely to provide a forum for the discussion of questions relating to Canadian history." It too invited "the widest expression of opinion, whether in contributions or in correspondence."<sup>44</sup>

Subscribing to and reading (paying attention to) specialized journals made one a member of an extended community with shared value commitments. The publication of reader responses helped to create the sense of a polite conversation stretching through time. Finally, the invitation to contribute was particularly important in turning attention

<sup>42</sup> *Canadian Forum*, Toronto, October 1920, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> The editorial of December 1921, announcing the expansion of the journal from a quarterly to a monthly, similarly proposed to stimulate Canada's literary and artistic life by functioning as a "clearing-house for thought and information." *The Canadian Bookman*, December 1921.

<sup>44</sup> *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, March 1920, p. 2.

away from the circulation of commodities (which these journals, after all, still were) toward the circulation of ideas. This distinction was critical in enabling journals to project a social space of intellectual and cultural encounters different from the exchanges of a market.

### Culture or Commodity?

In 1921 a small group of well known Canadian writers met to form the Canadian Authors' Association in order to protest copyright legislation that would have advantaged publishers by limiting authors' rights and royalties. The CAA further proposed "To act for the mutual benefit and protection of the interests of Canadian Authors and for the maintenance of high ideals and practice in the literary profession."<sup>45</sup> While the CAA did not see any inconsistency in these goals, the *Canadian Forum* thought otherwise, noting that one of the objectives called for "vigorous self-protection and the other for vigorous self-criticism."

Later that year the launch of Book Week, an ambitious publicity campaign staged with the aim of getting Canadians to buy and read Canadian books, provided the occasion for an extended airing of the issues. Writing for *The Canadian Forum*, literary editor Barker Fairley condemned the event even before it occurred:

When violent methods of publicity are employed in almost every other sphere of life it is difficult to object to them in a really worthy cause. . . But there remains a word to be said. Shock tactics do not in the long run serve the best interests of literature. . . The fact is that sales of books, whatever temporary satisfaction they bring, are ultimately fruitless unless enlightened interest is behind them, and enlightened interest cannot be created in a week. It must have time.<sup>46</sup>

The CAA defended its position vigorously both in the *Canadian Bookman* and in

<sup>45</sup> *Canadian Forum*, Vol. I, No. 8, May 1921, p. 230.

<sup>46</sup> *Canadian Forum*, Vol. II, No. 14, November 1921, p. 422.



the *Canadian Forum* letters page, arguing that "enlightened interest must be preceded by attention, and. . . [a]ttention is a thing for which there is more competition, in this age, than for anything else."<sup>47</sup> Book Week was, Sandwell insisted, "not a call to the Canadian people to abnegate their own judgment . . . It is rather a call to the Canadian people to use more judgment. . . and then to buy, not *any* Canadian book. . . but the Canadian books most suitable to their requirements."<sup>48</sup> Buying a book, Sandwell proposed, was an "act of judgment expressed in the only way in which most Canadians can express their judgment of books, namely by acts of purchase."<sup>49</sup> The transaction involved more than "mere dollars and cents." Canadian literature, he declared, "is made when a Canadian with two dollars goes into a bookstore and buys a book of poems or a novel or a biography or an essay collection because it gives the picture or the attitude or the view which he as a Canadian thinks needs to be given. Without that act by the Canadian reader, Canadian literature will never be made at all. . . The Canadian authors cannot do it alone."<sup>49</sup>

Fairley remained unconvinced. Canadians desired literature, he acknowledged, but too often they were willing to accept "reading matter at any cost, cheap novels rather than no novels, anything to kill time in a street-car. This is the most ineradicable narcotic of our modern life. Canada shares it with the rest of the western world. It has more of a physiological than a mental relation to good writing, but it uses the same outward medium and the two are continually getting confused."<sup>50</sup> Under such conditions, the CAA should not to pander to the weakness of "spiritual 'dope-fiends'" or indulge in "an orgy of mutual congratulation," but provide "some means of distinguishing the chaff

<sup>47</sup> *Canadian Forum*, December 1921, Vol. II, No. 15, p. 459.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

from the grain."<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, although there was as yet no book that fully expressed the strength and character of the Canadian people, a severe diet of criticism would "help our infant literature to grow from small to larger."<sup>52</sup>

The Book Week exchange initiated a conversation that continued for the remainder of the decade, pitting those who supported traditional understandings of culture against those struggling to come to terms with culture made available in the form of commodities in the context of mass markets. Traditionalists, like well-known Canadian expatriate author Basil King, asked if it was reasonable to expect great literature from a young country, proposing instead that the value of Canada's cultural efforts lay "not in achievement, but in promise."<sup>53</sup> The societies that produced great works of literature took a thousand years to create a single masterpiece. The important thing, King offered, was "to make a start."<sup>54</sup> Publisher Lorne Pierce offered a similar judgment, noting that there was in the national ideal, "no high and controlling principle, which from generation to generation has guided us like a star." Canadian literature was at the beginning of its development. "We must learn to know ourselves by knowing the best of all we have thought or achieved,"<sup>55</sup> he proposed, echoing Mathew Arnold. Others objected that the implied immaturity of Canadian accomplishments was defeatist and rejected the "evolutionary hypothesis" as misapplied to culture.<sup>56</sup> Canadians did not need to begin at the beginning because Canada was "the child and heir of all the literature

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>53</sup> Basil King, "To the Editor," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. II, No. 16, January 1922, p. 491.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Lorne Pierce, "Canadian Literature and the National Ideal," *Canadian Bookman*, September 1925, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Lyon Sharman, "To the Editor," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. II, No. 17, February 1922, pp. 525-526. See also S. C. Swift in the same issue, pp. 534-525.

written in the English language."<sup>57</sup> Her authors needed only to study the proper models to improve their craft. The classics, as one contributor explained, "already contain the secret of perfect art." In both cases, there was a commitment to the idea of culture as a positive body of achievement and critical standard. Others found the idea of a made in Canada culture inherently problematic. As one correspondent explained, national art "cannot be made, it just grows, and the whole trouble . . . with Canadian Book Week lies in the presumption that it can be made."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, several contributors suggested that the accent on nation was an aspect of the publishing industry, and therefore as a matter of commerce rather than a question of art.

Six years later the debate was still underway. The themes were perhaps clearer, but the battle was no closer to being resolved. One of the last exchanges on this theme, that between the poets A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott, has taken on an iconic quality. Smith, acknowledging that tradition guided the development of literature in old countries, asked for principles to direct writers in new countries.<sup>59</sup> He dismissed the boosterism of the sort associated with "Buy Made in Canada Goods" as a mercantile maxim unsuited to things of mind and spirit and mocked those who bought Canadian poets "from the same patriotic motive that prompts the purchaser of Eddy's matches or a Massey-Harris farm implement." Meanwhile the search for audiences was in danger of turning artists into merchants. The solution he proposed was a body of critical opinion to hearten and direct the otherwise "leaderless army" of Canadian writers, an image that was perhaps more

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> A. Gordon, "To the Editor," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. II, No. 18, March 1922, pp. 558-559.

<sup>59</sup> A. J. M. Smith, "Wanted—Canadian Criticism," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. VIII, No. 91, April 1928, pp. 600-601.

redolent of the industrial plant manager than the contemplative critic. Indeed, Scott rejected Smith's arguments by associating them, not with high culture, but with the scientific method and the industrial process.<sup>60</sup> He suggested that Smith's call to formulate a critical system and all such principles of poetic production were attributes of commerce rather than culture, concluding that a "nation cannot be deliberate about its art."

Although intellectual and cultural elites wanted to de-emphasize the production and commercialization of cultural goods, the themes of the market continued to reappear. The conflict between critical standards (seen as fundamental to high culture), and the production of national culture (associated with the marketplace and the economics and processes of production and consumption) remained unresolved. Inherited understandings of culture remained in tension with new realities that located the circulation of culture in the marketplace rather than the drawing room.

#### **A Cultural Alternative?**

Thinking about culture settled around three related themes. The first was the expansion of standardized mass culture. The second was the sense that life had become fragmented and over-civilized- the essential unity had once bound producers and consumers, and means and ends together in an organic community no longer existed. The third problem was the dearth of a distinctively Canadian culture. Cultural renewal was considered the cure for all of these concerns. Culture would act as an antidote to the leveling and homogenizing effects of mass consumption. Culture was the place where the organic unity of society would be re-forged and the essence of being rediscovered.

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<sup>60</sup> F. R. Scott, "To the Editor," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. VIII, No. 93, June 1928, pp. 697-698.



Culture would make the nation by making it available in the form of cultural commodities. This new sense of the possibilities of culture as cure has been described as therapeutic or anti-modern insofar as culture offered the means to treat the disorders and diseases of modernity and supply the missing national feeling.<sup>61</sup> To be against modernity in Canada in the twenties was to reject the disciplines of the market that increasingly constrained professional and daily life. And yet, ironically, it was the processes of commodification (that is, of appropriation through representation and exchange) which made anti-modern values and authentic experiences accessible. Therapeutic culture was a paradox of sorts, setting a market value on objects that were deemed desirable because they claimed to exist outside the circuit of exchange values and commodity relations.<sup>62</sup>

Middle-class cultural mediators in a variety of fields repeated Bowles' evocation of a simpler, more satisfying way of life during this period. The Maritime Folk, the romantic wilderness artist, the *Quebecois* peasant, the North American Indian were all discovered or "re-imagined" during the interwar years as representative of other, more authentic ways of being. In each case, the distinction between genuine and artificial culture depended upon invented notions of primitive and pre-industrial life imagined in contrast to mass consumer commodity culture. The appeal to transcendent timeless values gained strength in an environment of rapid social and technological change and in contradistinction to characteristics of novelty, sensationalism, indiscriminating shallow

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<sup>61</sup> Therapeutic culture, according to American historian T. Jackson Lears, helped to shift the framework of American morality from salvation through self-denial to self-fulfillment in the present by exalting authentic experience as an end in itself. While the older morality encouraged behaviours that were in accordance with the producer culture of an industrializing society during its building-up phase, the newer morality eased adjustment to a culture of consumption. T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*, pp. xv, 52-56.

<sup>62</sup> Phillips and Steiner, pp. 203-204.

entertainments associated with mass culture.

The commoditization of anti-modern values involved a new group of cultural mediators, traveling between the world of the authentic and the world of the everyday. It was the trope of the "romantic quest" rather than that of commercial exchange which structured the efforts of those who identified themselves, not as cultural middlemen, but as bushwhackers, prospectors, woodsmen, saviours and gatekeepers.<sup>63</sup> Artists in the Group of Seven, folklore collectors and promoters like Maritimers Helen Creighton and Mary Black, academic ethnologists and anthropologists like Marius Barbeau and Edward Sapir saw themselves and were seen by others as conduits through which authentic experiences could be rescued and re-presented to the larger public. As they travelled between worlds, they collected artifacts and images which, stripped of context, were inserted into the market in the form of works of art or artifacts rather than as commodities. Anti-modern values structured the understanding of both the present and the past, and then made available through capitalism the experiences from which it seemed to provide momentary and partial escape.<sup>64</sup> Through these efforts the anti-modern opposites of modern Canada were identified and incorporated into consumer capitalism. Although the producers of national culture styled themselves as romantics and emphasized their disdain for commercial forms of art, categories like the Folk, the uninhabited wilderness, and the sturdy pioneer forbearer were from the start commodified categories imagined by middle-class professionals in search of "the marketable story, the

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<sup>63</sup> Lynda Jessup, "Bushwhackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 131; Phillips, p. 447.

<sup>64</sup> MacKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, p. 35; Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Experience," p. 155.

money-making song, the winning image."<sup>65</sup> The producers of national culture were not the folk, but the experts and enthusiasts who embraced the folk and the primitive ideal.

The Group of Seven and their supporters were prolific and articulate writers, who clearly set out the circular and mutually reinforcing nature of the relationship between artist, subject, and consumer as the "Other" of mass culture. Writing for *Canadian Bookman*, Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris, for example, counterpointed the mystic union of artist and audience with the empty commercial exchanges of the mass market, insisting that the artist, when possessed by the creative spirit, "represents at one and the same time the eliciting power of his audience and its possibilities of response."<sup>66</sup> Harris was firm in distinguishing between the needs of an audience and "what the public wants."<sup>67</sup> The former were "true" needs; the latter were "superficial, external, sensual, the concern of the appetites, the job of the panderer, the shrewd seeker after money or fame." While it might be the case that "to make a success of most enterprises a certain amount of this is essential, it is none the less belittling." The true artist summarized and clarified, giving precision to "the hidden highest longings of the audience so that they may come closer to a recognition of their greater selves" and achieve a sense "of the fullness of life." Art, fellow painter Arthur Lismer similarly insisted, in spite of the evidence provided by his own career, was not a professional skill or a subject in a curriculum, but the "means to a richer way of life...Art is not perfection...Art is the process of becoming"<sup>68</sup> and "a form of intuition."<sup>69</sup> The artist and his audience were

<sup>65</sup> McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, p. 273.

<sup>66</sup> Lawren Harris, "Artist and Audience," *The Canadian Bookman*, December 1925, p. 197.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Arthur Lismer, painter and director of the Ontario College of Art, "The Value, Meaning

"interdependent," united in creative activity. Indeed one of the distinguishing strengths of a great artist was the ability to perceive the finer impulses of his audience, "its aspirations, half formed visions and high dreams." In this way, wrote Harris, the experience of collective purpose would emerge in the creation of works of art. Or as a story in *Canadian Forum* more simply recounted, "Our health and worth as a nation depends ultimately on the self-knowledge that comes from . . . recognition." Seeing the paintings of the Group of Seven, it was reported, made one "feel Canadian."<sup>70</sup> Through art, the Canadian would people find themselves.<sup>71</sup> They would become "Home-conscious."<sup>72</sup>

The Group presented themselves, art historian Lynda Jessup observes, as authentic and original artists, and thus as "authentically uncommercial" artists, working in opposition to the mass produced and the mass consumed and the ugliness they saw as fostered by commercialism.<sup>73</sup> The paintings of the Group of Seven, alongside other

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and Place of Art in Education," *Dalhousie Review*, July 1928, p. 389.

<sup>69</sup> Cited by F. B. Housser, *Canadian Bookman*, p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> *Canadian Forum*, Vol. I, May 1921, p. 230.

<sup>71</sup> Lawren Harris, "Winning a Canadian Background," *Canadian Bookman*, February 1923, p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Arthur Lismer cited by F. B. Housser, "Ideas of a Painter," *Canadian Bookman*, April 1925, p. 70.

<sup>73</sup> The artists of the Group, epitomized in the tragic example of Tom Thompson, presented themselves as direct and even child-like in their emotional responses, particularly in the joy they took in life and work. In spite of their education and commercial involvements, they described themselves as uncontaminated by professionalism or European training, and lacking in acquisitive instincts. They were frequently described as "natural artists." Also important was the example of their sociability. Like the peasant and the Folk, the members of the Group formed an organic, mutually supportive productive community. A key work in the creation of the mythology of the Group is F. B. Housser, *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), pp. 28, 30, 31, 17, 25, 42, 33. Some of the commercial efforts of the Group of Seven are discussed in Tippet, pp. 82-85, and Douglas Cole, "Patron and Public: An Enquiry into the Success of the Group of Seven,"



developments like the system of national parks, served to organize the perception of the wilderness experiences by emphasizing the regenerative and solitary consumption of an elemental landscape. Artist and subject matter existed in a circular, mutually reinforcing relationship. Untainted by civilization, the wilderness was not a location for commodity exploitation but rather a place of recuperation, recreation and spiritual renewal, the antidote to the perceived ills and artificiality of contemporary life. Artistic representation helped to establish the value of the environment, facilitating the notion that one was "getting away from it all" in a landscape increasingly occupied by other tourists.<sup>74</sup> And yet solitude, privacy and an intimate, semi-spiritual relationship with "undisturbed natural beauty" were the primary modes of tourist consumption.<sup>75</sup> One went to the wilderness, art historian Lynda Jessup notes, not as producer but as a consumer.<sup>76</sup> Seeing wilderness required the knowledge to appreciate a particular representation of the land and the ability to ignore the contradictions embedded in achieving authentic experiences.<sup>77</sup> Creating views for consumption by the metropolitan market, the Group celebrated unspoiled wilderness while, paradoxically, looking for ways in which the essence of

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*Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1978; Lynda Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or The More Things Change....," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Summer 2002.

<sup>74</sup> The paintings of the Group were not, after all, expressive of a pre-existing essential Canadian identity, but were part of the construction of that understanding. The Group's presentation of itself as "authentically uncommercial" was a critique of market-driven art rather than a description of their practice. Lynda Jessup, "Bushwhackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," p. 131. Even today, Jessup writes, the artist's account of their sketching trips (and, thus, of their sketches) are still received at face value and accepted as chronicles of rugged engagement with an elemental, pre-modern environment." Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape," p. 162.

<sup>75</sup> Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape," p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. Jessup is citing an observation originally made by American environmental historian William Cronon.

<sup>77</sup> Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape," pp. 156-157.

wilderness could be represented and commercialized.<sup>78</sup> Insofar as wilderness experiences increasingly required one to ignore the presence of previous inhabitants, fellow tourists, and the availability of "unique" experience to others, they required a particular sort of cultural capital or social skill set. A similar process of selective imagining framed the "discovery" of the Maritime Folk during this period. As Ian McKay makes clear, the search for authenticity by middle-class cultural producers was very much bound up with the making of new forms of culture for the market. Folksong collections, folk festivals, and traditional handicrafts simultaneously represented and commodified the desired essences of authenticity that belonged to the Folk by decontextualizing artifacts and images and inserting them into the market.<sup>79</sup>

The invention of the concept of the Maritime Folk by middle class cultural producers (writers, artists, promoters, advertisers and collectors) was a way of thinking about the impact of modernity.<sup>80</sup> By the early twentieth century the marginalization of handicrafts by the factory and the department store was well underway. Contrary to the myth of rural self-sufficiency in many parts of Nova Scotia virtually nothing remained of the "old ways." Most traditional handicrafts had been rendered obsolete by industrial capitalism.<sup>81</sup> In this context, the Maritime revival did not so much discover and

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153. Benedict Anderson notes that "untouched" wilderness could not, by definition be national. Nationalizing wilderness required naming, mapping and representation by artists, railway companies, and tourist agencies. Anderson in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 99.

<sup>79</sup> McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, p. 273.

<sup>80</sup> The invention of tradition was not limited to the handicrafts revival. Phillips notes the same phenomena in the collecting practices of interwar anthropologists. Ruth B. Phillips, "The Collecting and Display of Souvenir Arts; Authenticity and the 'Strictly Commercial'," in H. Murphy and M. Perkins (ed), *Anthropology of Art: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 447.

<sup>81</sup> McKay, "The Logic of Handicrafts," p. 118.

commercialize traditional practices as re-invent them, imagined according to the international rules of pre-modern aesthetics. Selecting representative folksongs and revitalizing traditional handicrafts like rug making, enthusiasts transformed the culture they found to create "new antiques" and a stereotypically European Folk, leading simple, pre-modern lives. These Folk and their ways became the mainstay of a successful tourist industry. The structure of this process followed that of the Group of Seven. The essence of the Folk lay in their material culture, their lore and their songs. Although threatened by modernity, this core of genuine being could be saved, transferred to other hands and represented to a larger urban audience, desperate for contact with the genuine rather than mass culture.

Nova Scotia was not the only home of authenticity. Seeking to explain the perceived absence of Canadian culture, others turned to Quebec, finding in the habitant the practices and values missing in the modern nation. While the discussion of the Quebecois as the "Other" of modernity was not limited to the twenties, what was specific to this decade was the dichotomy between the Folk as productive members of an allegedly organic, traditional society and the consuming urban masses: restless, seeking novelty and non-productive. Lillian Barry's article, the "Soul of Canada," prepared for *The Canadian Bookman* provides a case in point.<sup>82</sup> French-speaking Canada, she explained, was distinguished by a passionate love of land. The affectionate contact of successive generations cultivating the same soil, obeying the same laws, speaking the same language, and adjusting to the same climate was compared favourably to the ways of English-speaking Canadians who lacked solidarity and continuity. The people of

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<sup>82</sup> Lily Barry, "Soul of Canada," *Canadian Bookman*, 1925, p. 1, 4-5.

English-speaking Canada "did not love the land because they did not own it," but instead owed allegiance to the bank and the insurance company. They had no deep roots. There were no common social customs, nor particular standards of taste, morals, education or custom. In comparison, Barry explained, French-speaking Canadians produced works of art that were vital and enduring because they were rooted in simplicity and sincerity. Meanwhile, in English-speaking Canada, conditions of employment were precarious. All was "flux and indecision." People could not get "set in a firm mould." Art could not be made.

Group of Seven painter and art educator Arthur Lismer used the same descriptive pattern. "There are still places in Canada," Lismer wrote, "particularly in Quebec, "where simple people live natural, hardworking lives without the grayness and futility that so often accompanies life in newer settlements."<sup>83</sup> "Life in a community where the faculty known as art is exercised as a common every day task, is infinitely brighter than in those communities where the machine-made products of factories abound. It is not much to the credit of Canada that the department store with its multitudinous variety of unnecessary things has invaded and swamped the simpler, home-made products of the people." The Quebecois, Lismer explained referencing a well known description by the German composer Richard Wagner, were the Folk and the "epitome of all those who feel a common and collective need."<sup>84</sup> Their work and their crafts were made in response to necessity and not for export or trade and were a source of pride. Their art was not merely an escape from "the banalities of existence," but was fundamental, inherent and expressive. "Primitive, or let us say, simple people feel beauty naturally. Children are

<sup>83</sup> Arthur Lismer, "Art a Common Necessity," *Canadian Bookman*, October 1925, p. 159.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.



like this. It is not acquired. It is not merely taste. It is intuitive." The art of the folk, like that of children was defined as above or antithetical to the market.<sup>85</sup>

In an interesting effort to operationalize this debate for the purposes of national culture, Lismer proposed that the government modify immigration policy to bring more peasants to Canada. Attempt should be made to search out the leading potters, weavers, stonecutters, metal and wood workers, to conserve their fundamental talents for the up-building of a permanent quality in the nation, and to teach others the "desire for expression which all real peasant people have." Barry, meanwhile, called for a programme of home ownership and financing as the solution to the absence of a national literature and national culture. "The poet, the artist, the playwright," she insisted, would "gladly seek inspiration among the real folk who live real lives in real homes."<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Lismer's discussion blended the thinking of the British Arts and Crafts Movement, with its emphasis on the dignity of production over consumption, with the paternalism of the later Victorian attitudes to primitive peoples.

<sup>86</sup> Barry and Lismer were far from unique in their idealization of the Quebecois as an organic, traditional community, suspended in time and distanced from modern life. Folk-culture enthusiast and CPR publicity agent John Murray Gibbon (himself the publisher of a four volume collection of French Canadian folk songs in the 1920s and the organizing force behind the Quebec Folk Song and Handicraft Festival) noted, for example, that Lighthall saw in the folksongs of the habitant medieval "love of music, warmth or sentiment, romance, [and] pleasure in work." Gibbon believed that most folksongs as sung in Canada were work songs. On the "cult of the habitant" see Donald Wright, pp. 137-139, 148-149. On Gibbon see McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, pp. 57-58. On earlier idealization of the Quebecois see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power*, pp. 140-147. The nation's foremost collector of Quebecois folksongs at this time was anthropologist Marius Barbeau. Barbeau took the unique step of applying anthropological techniques used in his work among the Huron and the North Pacific Coast cultures to the study of French Canada. Barbeau wrote that he sought to secure "the unexplored poetic [and] melodic riches of the people, this obscure patrimony that the rural population conserves unconsciously for the regeneration of the race." In addition to collecting, recording, transcribing and publishing folksongs, folk anecdotes and folklore, Barbeau brought folk performers to concert stages in the nation's urban centers, wrote for the general public in *CHR*, *Canadian Forum*, and CPR guidebooks, and published several books on Quebecois culture. L. Nowry, *Marius Barbeau: Man of Mana* (Toronto: NC Press Ltd, 1995), pp.

In these discussions purposefulness was often the criteria that distinguished between genuine goods (made for personal or domestic use) and those that were made for sale (regarded as strictly commercial). Immediacy (paintings based on sketches made in the field, "hard won impressions of places where the going was tough"<sup>87</sup>) was valued more than commercial works by the same artist.<sup>88</sup> Artifacts that exhibited patina (evidence of use and age) were more valued than replicas, even when made by the same craftsmen, using the same techniques.<sup>89</sup> The difference, however, was as much in the mode of consumption as in the production process itself. Pre-modern aesthetics provided the lessons needed to save modern Canada from itself, teaching values like simplicity, honesty, modesty, controlled (rather than radical) creativity and the value of constancy rather than change. Not everyone needed to be a member of a traditional community. People could recognize their true selves in the paintings of the Group and the handicrafts of the Folk, and experience through consumption the values needed to save Canada from its modern self. What had been lost in the realm of everyday life could be regained in the realm of culture. There was, of course, a paradox in cultural consumption that celebrated 'folk' practices as 'outside' of the market, while simultaneously urging Canadians to buy these ostensibly non-market creations in order to represent their own 'authentic values.'

Was there a direct route to authentic experience? Exploring the pastoral rather than the primitive, Marcus Adeney addressed this problem in two articles written for

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187, 190, 193; on Gibbon see 283 ff.

<sup>87</sup> A. Y. Jackson cited in Jessup, "Bushwhackers in the Gallery," p. 134.

<sup>88</sup> Group of Seven members defined themselves as authentic and original artists, and thus as "authentically uncommercial" artists, in opposition to the mass produced and the mass consumed and the ugliness they saw as fostered by commercialism. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>89</sup> Phillips discusses the valuing of age and use as criterion of authenticity in the collection of Native American artifacts during this period. Phillips, "The Collecting and Display of Souvenir Arts," pp. 441-443.

*Canadian Forum*. Connecting creativity with self-reliance, Adeney offered an extended meditation on the virtues of small town life which he broadly associated with producerist practices. "Who derives the most satisfaction," Adeney asked, "the man who creates or the man who buys the use of a man-created thing?"<sup>90</sup> He marvelled at "the utopian possibilities of the small town," which, he suggested, if suddenly cut off from the rest of the world, would become a centre of individual self expression.<sup>91</sup> In lieu of natural disaster, he celebrated the spirit of the amateur as "essential to man's ultimate victory over expediency." Today's culture, Adeney remarked, was largely standardized and had been "devitalized" in the process. The amateur, on the other hand, was bound neither by tradition nor by "the imposition of worthless machine-made literature and films." The true amateur was "a spiritually articulate human being," while those who consumed goods produced mechanically, possessed only mechanical values.<sup>92</sup> Driven by the need for self-expression, the amateur spirit was available to all, ready to release creative energy into the community. It is surprising then to realize that the inspiration for Adeney's account was Paris, Ontario, a small town perhaps but one very much in the mainstream of industrialization.<sup>93</sup> The celebration of amateurism was another aspect of the search for a simpler, more satisfying alternative to the cycle of mass production and mass consumption. The amateur, like the Folk, was an imagined alternative to mass

<sup>90</sup> Marcus Adeney, "The Amateur Spirit", *Canadian Forum*, Vol. VIII, No. 95, August 1928, p. 756.

<sup>91</sup> Marcus Adeney, "The Community Spirit," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. VIII, No. 85, October 1927, p. 427.

<sup>92</sup> Adeney, "The Amateur Spirit", p. 756.

<sup>93</sup> See Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, for a very different view of Paris as a community developed around the presence of industry.

commodity culture.<sup>94</sup>

Adeney's account raises another issue common to all of these cultural efforts: the need to suppress or wilfully ignore evidence of modernity that pervaded the communities labelled authentic. All of these efforts to imagine the anti-modern can be said to reveal what Ruth Phillips describes as the "sheer strength of the avoidance of the modernity that was everywhere about them."<sup>95</sup> There were by the 1920s few places in Canada beyond the touch of the modern. Paris was near the centre of Ontario's industrial heartland. In Nova Scotia, a century of capitalist development and widespread outmigration made the province more of a "transit station" than a quiet haven of tranquillity.<sup>96</sup> Coal mines, lumber camps, and a large scale fishing industry; banks and department stores; the modern media of newspapers, radios and books, were all present; the idea of a pre-modern fisher-folk living in isolation from modernity but close to nature depended, not on empirical observation, but on the exclusion of evidence of modernity. It was the definitiveness of this rejection of modernity in spite of its visible presence (indeed in spite of their own presence as emissaries of modernity<sup>97</sup>) that created a series of paradoxes in which the imagined past came to be seen as more real than the present.

Other qualities of life needed to be ignored as well. In the native lands, the outports and the Quebec farm, lives of poverty were redescribed as lives of greater

<sup>94</sup> The commercial potential of amateur activities (and the absence of a genuine dichotomy between the amateur spirit and commodity culture) was already recognized, as evidenced by columns on hobbies in the daily press, the publication of sheet music and theatre scripts for amateur performances, the availability of art lessons, and the popularity of recreational hunting and fishing.

<sup>95</sup> Phillips, "The Collection and Display of Souvenir Arts," p. 447.

<sup>96</sup> McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, p. 28. "Why, one wonders, does the roar of the trains and the scurrying of automobiles count for so little and the ox-driven carts for so much?" *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106 on this theme.



meaning. Poverty and deprivation were reframed as simplicity.<sup>98</sup> Imagining the wilderness involved overlooking the presence of people dwelling in land described as vacant. The desire for authentic experiences meant that it was necessary to close one's eyes to the mass availability of experiences that were imagined to be unique or the privilege of a few. The determination to cultivate nationalism required overlooking the limited appeal of journals that purported to speak for the nation. Above all, the utility of anti-modernism required blindness to its own commercial involvements. Elite culture, no less than mass culture, offered stimulating experiences realized within the system of capitalist relations.<sup>99</sup> Ultimately, the ability to sell authentic experiences, to develop a heritage industry,<sup>100</sup> to distinguish between true replicas and false souvenirs, depended upon the willingness to disregard the process of cultural selection, invention and

<sup>98</sup> This represented a reversal of earlier Victorian understandings of pioneer, native and outport life as deprived and impoverished. A way of life that had been scorned as primitive, backwards and distanced from modernity was redescribed as authentic and true. McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, pp. xv, 9, 29. "What had been regarded as crude and pagan became celebrated as authentic and admirable; what had been read as progressive became identified as degenerative. The championship of the primitive as a locus of value lost in the course of Western industrialization and urbanization is permeated with a tragic irony, for it threatened the futures of the peoples whose pasts it celebrated." Phillips, "The Collecting and Display of Souvenir Arts," p. 437. On this theme also see Ian McKay, "Among the Fisherfolk: J. F. B. Livesay and the Invention of Peggy's Cove," in J. M. Bumsted (ed), *Interpreting Canada's Past: Vol. II, After Confederation, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, (Toronto: Oxford, 1993), p. 496-499.

<sup>99</sup> There has been a tendency to categorize high culture images as romantic while dismissing the choices of working class as escapist. However it is clear that the cultural products with the greatest appeal, regardless of whether the intended audience was elite or popular, were tales of romance and escape (whether rugged or glamorous, whether to distant lands or simpler pasts), and a certain larger than life heroism (whether presented by Douglas Fairbanks or Tom Thompson). See "The Conundrum of Culture," in John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939, Decades of Discord*, pp. 159-192 for a more conventional discussion of elite versus popular culture.

<sup>100</sup> "What is most striking in retrospect is how unparadoxically these dual tasks were conceived. The term 'heritage industry' did not sound oxymoronic in people's ears." Anderson, "Staging Antimodernism in the Age of High Capitalist Nationalism," in Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, p. 98.

distribution, to exaggerate differences, to overlook similarities, and to ignore the structure of commodity relations that underlay both elite and mass culture.

### **Culture as a Total Way of Life**

The impact of this way of seeing and not seeing was pervasive, shaping new ways of thinking about culture as well as cultural practices. Linking theorizing about modern life to these cultural efforts, it is evident that the idea of culture as a total way of life emerged during the interwar period, not from the study of existing societies, but from the contrast between modernity and pasts and places imagined as simpler and more satisfying than the present. Ultimately, mass consumption rather than mass production defined the boundary between an authentic culture of genuine experiences and inauthentic culture characterized by consumption of the standardized, the simplified and the interchangeable.

Two longtime sojourners in Canada, Edward Sapir and Robert MacIver explored the theoretical underpinnings of culture as a total way of life. Both used the concept of culture as a critique of modern civilization. Sapir came to Canada from the United States in 1910 to build and head the Anthropology Division of the Geological Survey. He stayed until 1925 when he left for a position at the University of Chicago. A noted linguist and anthropologist, Sapir was an active member of Ottawa's cultural community, contributing frequently to *Canadian Forum*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Canadian Magazine* and *Dalhousie Review*. Canadian poet A. J. M. Smith commended Sapir's poetry, together with that of E. J. Pratt, for its modern treatment of Canadian themes.<sup>101</sup> MacIver came in

<sup>101</sup> A. J. M. Smith, "Wanted—Canadian Criticism," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. VIII, No. 91, April 1928, p. 600. Many social scientists of Sapir's day "dabbled" in the arts. Sapir differed from most others in the degree to which he defined his personal and professional identity in terms of his art as well as his more scientific endeavours. From the perspective of American anthropology Sapir's poetic efforts were not unusual, but they

1915 from Scotland to fill the position of associate professor in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto. He was head of that department from 1922 until he left Canada in 1927 to take a position in sociology at Barnard College, University of Columbia. A reformist in his politics, MacIver was personal friends with several members of the Group of Seven. Like Sapir, he was a contributor to many of Canada's intellectual journals.

In a seminal article, published in *The Dalhousie Review* two years prior to its more famous appearance in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Sapir contended that "Every profound change in the flow of civilization, particularly every change in its economic bases, tends to bring about an unsettling and readjustment of culture values."<sup>102</sup>

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were regarded as excessive and have been attributed to his intellectual isolation in Ottawa and family problems. It is interesting to note, however, that his endeavors were consistent with the flourishing of the arts in Canada during the decade and a half that he resided there. For a discussion of Sapir's "experiments in aesthetics" see Regna Darnell, *Edward Sapir: linguist, anthropologist, humanist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 151-169. See also Richard Handler, "Sapir's Poetic Experience," *American Anthropologist, New Series*, Vol. 86, No. 2, June 1984.

<sup>102</sup> E. Sapir, "Culture, Genuine and Spurious," *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, July 1922), p. 175. Sapir's theoretical speculations were consistent with his practical work for the National Museum of Canada. Recent studies of documents associated with the process of building that collection reveal the degree to which selling and buying permeated the process of collecting. Although Sapir's own work involved him in negotiations for the acquisition of goods, he distinguished between replicas and originals and excluded certain categories, such as the production of tourist art, that were integral to native life as it was lived during the period he oversaw the National Museum's collection. The exchange of goods for money by the museum was regarded differently than transactions involving tourist art, such as modern baskets and moccasins. Moreover, the displays created by Sapir and others of his generation assembled reveal an "unrealistic" insistence on pre-modern qualities that required the reinvention of objects long since obsolete. The discourse of authenticity placed Native North Americans in a "double-bind." When Indians resist the commodification of their culture, they retain respect and nobility but doom themselves as cultural beings to die. When they succumb, they reveal their weakness and are rejected as deteriorated people. Privileging the past over the present excluded native community from participating in modern economy, often forcing collusion in the re-invention of tradition for the sake of the sale. McKay objects to same



Modern society, where rapid material progress had been won through processes of specialization and fragmentation, defeated individual efforts to lead a fully integrated life. The apparent accomplishments of machine civilization offered only a "spurious" sense of progress when measured against criteria of a "harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory culture."<sup>103</sup> Maladjustments between culture and civilization resulted in a "fragmentary existence" and an overwhelming sense of spiritual disharmony, "which the more sensitive individuals feel . . . as a fundamental lack of culture."<sup>104</sup>

"Part of the time we are dray horses," Sapir complained, "the rest of the time we are listless consumers of goods which have received no . . . impress of our personality." The consequent loss of harmony, he suggested, could be compensated by "spiritual heightening" in the "non-economic, the non-utilitarian" spheres of existence.<sup>105</sup> Acts of creativity and culture oriented man in the world. They allowed the individual to preserve his value as a cultured being. Against the "remorseless leveling force of average mind on average mind,"<sup>106</sup> Sapir offered self-mastery. The antidote to the fragmentation of modern life was the reintegration of production and consumption within the individual. Genuine culture lay, not in refined technique or in external mechanisms, but in

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double-bind in his study of the Maritime Folk. Championing the primitive as the locus of values lost in the course of western industrialization keeps culture static and places the carriers of this culture outside of the larger economy. Ordinary Canadians, working for wages and consuming mass goods, faced a less restrictive but similar dilemma, finding their preferred practices excluded from "National" culture, although in this case, the effect was to marginalize the elites rather than the masses. Phillips, "The Collecting and Display of Souvenir Arts," p. 443. McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, Chapter Five, pp. 274-311.

<sup>103</sup> Sapir, "Culture, Genuine and Spurious," pp. 172, 173.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>106</sup> E. Sapir, "Culture in New Countries," *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. II, No. 3, October 1922, p. 361.



harmonious, satisfying and integrated practices in which culture and economy were bound together in a living whole.

MacIver also dichotomized culture and civilization, and placed the cultured individual at the centre of the modern quest for meaning. In primitive society, whatever its disadvantages, he wrote, "men have the sense of being at home...their mental world is secure."<sup>107</sup> In such a world arts, crafts, rules, and techniques were embedded in the social system and regulated by cultural standards. In primitive life, culture and civilization, and ends and means were harmonized. In modern society, they remained unreconciled and antithetical. "The price we pay for being civilized," MacIver asserted, "is that we live in a peculiarly unstable world."<sup>108</sup> The apparatus of means (what people use), he wrote, has become separated from the apparatus of ends (how they use it). Civilization had separated from culture. The absence of larger goals left man in an alienated state of being. Work came to be viewed instrumentally and not as valuable in itself. Utility demanded standardization, mass production, ugliness and haste, but apparatus alone could not provide spiritual satisfaction. "Civilization is too much with us," he concluded in a paraphrase of Wordsworth, "getting and spending we lay waste to culture."<sup>109</sup>

Paradoxically, MacIver argued that separating the technical from the spiritual could be the solution as well as the problem, allowing the spiritual to be preserved rather than eliminated. In the case of the nation-state, for example, the mystical aspects once associated with the body of the state were "relocated" to the realm of culture. Through

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316-318.

<sup>108</sup> R. M. MacIver, "Civilization Versus Culture," *Dalhousie Review*, 1931-1932, p. 316.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

culture, man, on an individual basis, could be made whole. Unity could be found in "the will of each to be himself and achieve the objects that are dear to him . . . in the fulfillment of his own personality."<sup>110</sup>

In the writings of both Sapir and MacIver, the search for authentic culture gained meaning in relation to the advance of modernity. The category culture as a total way of life was shaped, not by analysis of the past, but the desire to critique the present.<sup>111</sup> In cultured societies, both men contended, workplace and home, public and private life, productive effort and personal recreation, production and consumption had been integrated. This was no longer possible in a modern age. Consumption of mass produced culture was rejected as passive escapism rather than regenerative experience. Instead, they argued that redemptive acts of culture offered an antidote to the separation of production and consumption. Traditional forms of culture (original, hand-made and inspired) and creative high culture experiences (whether as audience or artist) could repair the spiritual void that had been caused by large-scale industrialization. True culture and mass culture were again categorized as mutually exclusive.

### Conclusions

By mid decade the economic importance of mass consumption was obvious, however, the cultural conflict between mass and class remained unresolved. In spite of their considerable reservations, social observers had to confront the economic as well as the cultural implications of mass consumption.<sup>112</sup> The consumer, University of Toronto

<sup>110</sup> Owsam, p. 118.

<sup>111</sup> The idea of culture is "symptomatic" of the division it offers to overcome. Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 31.

<sup>112</sup> See for example articles by *Canadian Forum* editor, R. De Brisay, "The Opportunity of the City," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. V, No. 60, September 1925; by federal political

economist C. R. Fay protested, was "drenched with standardized novelties."

Advertisements "make the paper pay" and threatened to subordinate social and political news. In sports, team effort was sacrificed to the demands of managers who operated "with an eye on results."<sup>113</sup> However lamentable these changes, at issue was not simply the numerical superiority of the lower classes. As Fay was also forced to observe: "mass production without mass consumption is useless. It is mass consumption which makes mass production both possible and profitable." The problem was not that growth was impossible, but that the health of the economy was dependent upon modes of consumption that undermined traditional moral and aesthetic values. The dilemma, Fay caustically observed, was clear: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever, said the poet Keats. That is bad economics. For economic progress prescribes a new model every year as soon as the old one has been paid for, if not before."<sup>114</sup> Production had increased tremendously, but at what cost? The singular and the timeless had been pushed aside by the modern and the mass produced.

There is evidence that all classes were reworking their identities during this period to accommodate consumerist instead of, or in addition to, producerist standards.<sup>115</sup> In all

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economist J.A. Stevenson, "The fiscal future of Canada," *Canadian Forum*, November and December 1925, and by University of Toronto political economist V. W. Bladen, "The Rationalization of Industry," *Dalhousie Review*, April 1928, all of which suggest various ways to bring market size in line with productive capacity.

<sup>113</sup> C. R. Fay, "Capitalism and Counterpoise," *Dalhousie Review*, April 1926, p. 65.

<sup>114</sup> C. R. Fay, "Machinery and the Values of Life," *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. X, April 1930, pp. 72-73.

<sup>115</sup> Parr and Morton have shown that new practices could be integrated with existing ways of life, offering new ways to express traditional concerns and community values. The transformation of skilled labourers to breadwinners preserved their high status within the family and the community during a period of deskilling. Mass culture and class culture could be experienced with not apparent conflict to the participants. Popular music became part of church concert repertoires, adding to rather than displacing traditional

of these practices—elite and ordinary—goods were regarded as a source of potential unity and of potential difference, able to establish social memberships and indicate personal merit. Acts of consumption were not simply utilitarian matters. Choices did not simply reflect but could also construct identity. At a time when income was becoming more critical than education in the identification of class, intellectual and cultural elites attempted to shift the markers of status away from those attainable through training and education and towards those understood to require inspiration and insight, qualities of being and soul that distinguished the truly cultured from the passive masses. Denouncing some groups of Canadians for their lack of culture was a way of reaffirming different value commitments.<sup>116</sup>

At first glance, the search for an authentic national culture was the search for a way to rebuild the sense of community undermined by modern civilization. Indeed the state offered considerable support for anti-modern culture, including institutionalizing the Group of Seven as national artists, documenting Native life in the National Museum, supporting the development of tourist industries around the idea of the Maritime Folk and the Quebecois peasant, and building an accessible network of national parks. It would be

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choices and fostering a larger sense of community identity. The purchase of hunting paraphernalia reinforced and gave modern form to male traditions. Working women used their wages to purchase gifts as expressions of affection. Leaders in ethnic communities recognized the power of goods to shape identity and equated the decision to wear mass produced modern clothing with the abandonment of traditional values, suggesting that consumerism provided a means for immigrants to assimilate into modern Canadian life. Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 86, 149-150, 188; Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 34-35, 127-128; see Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause, Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 92-93, 99-100 for a discussion of contested use of modern dress within the Canadian Ukrainian community.

<sup>116</sup> Bocock, p. 84.



more accurate, however, to say that the tension between modern and anti-modern culture was institutionalized by state support which encouraged consumption alternatives rather than alternatives to consumption.

Culture and class structure shaped and remade each other as middle-class intellectuals and artists strove to redefine Canadian culture in a society of growing material opportunity.<sup>117</sup> When the nation is produced through culture, the abilities (both financial and educational) of those in a position to appreciate cultural goods can become a distinguishing factor. The consumption of mass culture by ordinary Canadians was treated as general commodity consumption while the consumption of commodities classified as cultural by elites was treated as culture. Cultural nationalism contained "a claim of equality," but was presented in opposition to the ways of life most Canadians engaged in on a daily basis. Maintaining standards in the face of increasing standardization was also a matter of maintaining class distinctions, and should be seen as part of the project of elite consolidation. While the American mode of living was associated with mass consumption, Canadian elites during this decade associated the good Canadian consumer with a very different series of choices, rejecting mass consumption as the basis for national identity. Those who consumed mass culture were not disenfranchised, but the sincerity and value of their citizenship was called into question.

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<sup>117</sup> McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, p. xvi.

## 7. Politicians, Economists and Consumers

Traditionally, historians of the twentieth century associate the expansion of consumerism with times of prosperity and the depression with the expansion of government. More recently, it has become apparent the crisis of the Great Depression was a significant transition point in the incorporation of mass consumption into the mainstream of political and economic policy. Even as Canadians struggled to make ends meet, policymakers began to articulate the common consumer interests they shared.<sup>1</sup>

In Canada, during these years a wide spectrum of politicians, economists, and self-proclaimed experts began to address the consumption problems of ordinary Canadians. Public discussion variously described the depression as a crisis of distribution, a crisis of overproduction, or a crisis of underconsumption. All of these pointed to fundamental shifts in the understanding of the power and productivity of the Canadian and the world economies. Poverty was no longer associated with the scarcity of goods but with the scarcity of the means to buy goods. Social security came to be seen as a problem of funding, and increasingly as a matter for government rather than family or community. Leading up to the 1935 election, politicians frequently spoke of the right to

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<sup>1</sup> These observations were made by American historian Lizabeth Cohen, but apply equally to Canadian historiography. See Lizabeth Cohen, "The New Deal State and the Making of Citizen Consumers," in *Getting and Spending*, ed. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, Mattias Jut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 111, and Lizabeth Cohen, *The Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), p. 18. See also on this theme K. Donohue, *Freedom From Want, American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) and James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Livingston sees the Depression as the culmination of a period of corporate consolidation that began in 1890. The transformation from capital to consumer led growth was made complete when confidence in private investment was shattered. pp. 112, 117.

economic as well as political freedoms and began to identify a role for the state in securing consumer rights. It was during this crisis and not during the expansionary phase of the economy that a positive notion of the Canadian citizen as a consumer was first advanced.

Throughout the depression period, however, the acceptance of consumer interests and the ability to conceive of the national economy as consumer driven remained constrained by widely shared understandings of Canada as an exporting nation. In America during these years the aggregate purchasing power of consumers came to be regarded as critical to the well-being of the national economy. While Canadian politicians and economists regarded increased levels of domestic consumption as desirable for social and political reasons, most continued to reject mass consumption as a solution to Canada's economic problems. Responses to the depression opened the way to a greater acceptance of the role of consumers as a political interest, but only limited acceptance of their economic importance.

### **The Onset of the Depression**

In the later years of the 1920s, capital investment in Canada's primary resource, energy and manufacturing sectors expanded dramatically, further increasing production capacity. New investment flowed into the chemical, pulp and paper and hydroelectric sectors. At the same time, as Europe recovered from wartime disruption, it was becoming evident that decades of productivity gains in the industrialized world and the expansion of modern production techniques to new regions threatened to overwhelm large sectors of the economy with an excess of goods. By the end of the decade Canadian

producers were facing international gluts in wheat,<sup>2</sup> declining prices in newsprint as capacity increased in advance of sales,<sup>3</sup> and a booming mining sector almost entirely dependent upon international exports. Several large capital projects were nearing completion. With limited opportunities for growth, the rate of new investment slowed. The nature of the expansion – focused on a few areas of the economy, geared to export, and funded by foreign debt – left the Canadian economy vulnerable to downturns in the world economy and to political changes such as increased protectionism. With high overhead costs, fixed debts and declining sales, surplus revenues were shrinking.

Consumer expenditures had risen strongly through the twenties. Though some resisted the appeal of mass consumption, poverty rather than reluctance was the more common cause of failure to participate in the expanding world of goods and services.<sup>4</sup> Although many working Canadians struggled to make do, increases in the supply of widely advertised, mass produced and cheaply branded goods and entertainments combined with slight gains in purchasing power to usher in new patterns of mass consumption. Spending on durable goods as a percentage of the economy rose steadily. However, the increasing importance of purchases that both dependent on credit and capable of being postponed, did not bode well for the sustainability of this sector in the event of downturn.<sup>5</sup> Sales of automobiles and residential construction, two key sectors of the domestic economy, seemed to be approaching market saturation with stable rather than growing levels of demand which could be supplied with current production

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<sup>2</sup> A. E. Safarian, *The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Markham: Penguin, 1988), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Safarian, p. 54.



capacity.<sup>6</sup>

In America the beginning of the depression is most commonly associated with the stock market collapse of 1929; Canadians tended to date it from 1928 when the largest wheat crop in the nation's history remained unsold. The depression was widely perceived as a crisis, not of scarcity, but of surplus. Production seemingly had begun, at least in the short term, to outstrip consumption. What was not clear was why. Had production really accelerated beyond the world's capacity to absorb goods and services, or were gluts due to temporary imbalances in supply and demand that would, over time, correct themselves? Were the causes largely monetary, involving problems of credit and foreign exchange, rather than fundamental limits in demand? Had buying and selling passed beyond the point where the stock of money in the world was sufficient to sustain it?<sup>7</sup>

Between 1929 and 1933 shrinking international markets, rising international tariffs, collapsing liquidity and shortages of domestic purchasing power, exacerbated by an absence of investment opportunities saw national expenditures decline by forty-two percent and per-capita incomes decline by forty-eight per cent.<sup>8</sup> At the low point of the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-57.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal of the Canadian Bankers Association*, January 1930, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Safarian, p.75; Thompson and Seager, p. 351. This figure represents the fall in net income; in reality there were significant differences between economic groups. Some industries and some regions were hit harder than others. Wheat farmers were hurt worst of all as drought and disease combined with deflation to destroy revenues. Canadians employed in consumer services were affected less than those working in primary industries. Organized, large-scale businesses, combines and monopolies suffered the least; the unorganized individual worker, which included most primary producers, farmers and industrial workers, suffered the most. The number of employed workers declined drastically, however, insofar as wage rates were relatively stable and prices declining, Canadians with secure jobs found themselves in a very different position than those without secure employment. Differences between regions and between classes

depression in 1933, somewhere between one-fifth and one-quarter of the labour force was out of work.<sup>9</sup> More than 1.4 million urban Canadians and several hundred thousand country dwellers were dependent upon the government for relief.<sup>10</sup> As savings evaporated and unemployment rose, standards of living began to decline.<sup>11</sup> And yet, until inventories ran down in the mid-thirties, store shelves and granaries remained stocked while many Canadians went hungry and ill-clothed. As the economist K. W. Taylor observed, "Idle machinery, idle labour power and surplus raw materials exist side by side with unemployment, acute privation, bankruptcy and blockade."<sup>12</sup>

Severe unemployment, mounting levels of debt and declining equity eroded allegiance to producerist values of hard work, savings, independence and property ownership. Before the depression it was primarily income earned from wages that gave legitimate entitlement to consumption. As the depression deepened, it was clear to many that ability and willingness no longer led automatically to jobs. As Canadians turned to the state for help, other forms of income gained in acceptability. Conservative social critics like Charlotte Whitton argued that the growing practice of paying relief in cash rather than vouchers was "wip[ing] out the last distinction between the family on relief and the struggling low paid wage earner's family."<sup>13</sup> How Canadians received income

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added to the tensions of these years.

<sup>9</sup> One in five, Safarian, p. 75; one in four, Thompson and Seager, p. 350.

<sup>10</sup> Michiel Horn, ed., *The Depression in Canada* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> In the early years of the depression, consumer expenditures exceeded disposable income as consumers drew down their savings to maintain their living standards. Safarian, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> K. W. Taylor, review of "Social Planning for Canada," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 15, December 1935, p. 400.

<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Whitton, "The Challenges of Relief," March 1934, in Michiel Horn (ed.), *The Depression in Canada: responses to economic crisis* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), p. 279.

continued to limit their freedom to spend; however, the moral difference between consumption authorized by the wages of work and consumption authorized by charity was softening.

### **Economists Consider the Causes**

In the late twenties young intellectuals in America were creating a new sort of cultural critique organized around the metaphor of the machine age.<sup>14</sup> Everyone, from literary critics to economists, was fascinated by the relatively sudden increases in the scale of industrial operation since the turn of the century that had brought startling improvements in labour productivity. As economic conditions worsened, the displacement of men by machines in the realm of production became almost a cliché. At the same time, the expansion of an economy geared towards the mass consumption of goods moved the idea of the consumer to the centre of economic discussion. Canadian thinkers were not unaware of these developments, but the range of response in this country was guarded. Economists in particular questioned the applicability of the new ideas for Canada and rebuffed challenges to classical economic theory. Changes in consumption, whether in the form of increases in wages or reductions in the hours, were rejected as possible solutions to labour's growing woes.

C. R. Fay at the University of Toronto was typical of those economists who rebuffed suggestions that the growth of working class consumption could save the country from the depression. The problem with working class spending was its unpredictability. "People buy what they cannot afford, and buy recklessly. The glitter of

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<sup>14</sup> On this theme see Livingston, pp. 107 ff.

the big wholesale goods overwhelms their prudence."<sup>15</sup> Left to himself, "the worker does not fill the cup of necessities before pouring any of his wages into others vessels." The common factor, Fay explained, was a demand for immediately consumed goods able to confer rapid satisfaction.<sup>16</sup> These expenditures, he objected, "make no direct provision for the production of the instruments of industry." Increasing working class wages would only reduce the surplus available for reinvestment. Over time this would result in decreased efficiency and a reduction in standards of living. Transfers from capital to wages would promote a more even distribution of wealth, but would not revitalize the economy. In Fay's opinion capital investment rather than consumer spending remained the most effective stimulant to growth.

Fay's views cannot be dismissed as those of a reactionary conservative. He did not emphasize production as the sole source of value. Indeed in some ways he could be said to hold consumerist views, up-holding the liberating power of education, the delight of sport, and the value of increasing leisure time for thoughtfulness as the appropriate ends of economic effort. However, he continued to believe that advancement in the standard of living depended upon increasing efficiency and productivity. Instead workers were urged to look, not to the wage system, but to government and increased social endowments. Resources diverted from material production to education and health care, to government buildings, equipment and increased skills would increase the quality of life even under constant wages. The problem as Fay saw it, was not that consumption was illegitimate but that workers made the wrong choices, eroding society's store of

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<sup>15</sup> C. R. Fay, "Machinery and the Values of Life," *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. X, April 1930, p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> C. R. Fay, "The Doctrine of Greater Consumption," *Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association*, Vol. 37, No. 2, January 1930, p. 170.



capital, whereas business and government made investments with lasting returns.

If increasing working class wages were inadequate or inappropriate stimulants to economic growth, perhaps a shorter workday would redistribute incomes, insuring an adequate living for all. Economist Clyde Dankert, a frequent contributor to *Canadian Forum* and *Dalhousie Review*, observed that the possibility of satisfying material needs with less labour was a question that had received the attention of thinkers for centuries.<sup>17</sup>

In utopian communities the ideal life was associated, not with the increased consumption of goods, but with increases in leisure time devoted to "learning joyously," exercise, and the development of the arts. In the industrialized nations, Dankert suggested, similar efforts could be made to expand opportunities for intellectual, spiritual and physical development, not to fill the time left by reduced hours of work, but to counteract many of the unfavorable effects of mechanized production.<sup>18</sup>

Utopian goals were admirable, but the means to achieve them, which generally involved the reorganization of production to satisfy material needs with less work or the restriction of production to necessities, were not suitable in a competitive economic order that valued private property and a steadily rising standard of living. If working hours were to be reduced, Dankert argued, it would be by the continuous improvement and spread of machinery and machine methods. Abandoning the advantages of mechanization would increase employment, but "mere employment is not the thing in which we are primarily interested."<sup>19</sup> Work was not an end in itself, but the means to obtain income and to create goods and services. "First of all we desire an income, and in

<sup>17</sup> C. E. Dankert, "Work and Leisure." *Dalhousie Review*, July 1931.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>19</sup> C. E. Dankert, "National Wealth and Unemployment," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 15, July 1935, pp. 297.

addition we want to be able to buy as much as possible with that income. Purchasing power, the command over real wealth," was the chief consideration.<sup>20</sup> A more equitable distribution of employment might, Dankert agreed, be desirable for social reasons, but reducing the length of the work day would not enable Canadians to buy more. Increased leisure was the goal of utopia, but increased consumption was the goal of modern economic effort. Unless the reduction of the workday was accompanied by an increase in the aggregate amount of wealth, standards of living would fall. Finally, Dankert argued that the depression was not the result of increased efficiency, but of inefficiency.<sup>21</sup> It was not technological improvement but "cultural lag" that should be blamed.<sup>22</sup> Better planning, employment offices, public works, some increases in taxation and borrowing, and unemployment insurance were the expedients necessary to relieve distress. In the long-run, however, he cited the well-known economic maxim: "the demand for goods is the supply of goods."<sup>23</sup> For this reason purchasing power, he insisted, remained "largely dependent upon what we produce."

Both Fay and Dankert regarded increases in productivity as the sole means to progress. Improvements in standards of living for ordinary Canadians could follow from but not precede or instigate economic growth. Mass consumption did not figure in their solutions to the depression or to the general progress of society; indeed both tended to dismiss the value of working class consumption choices as neither culturally desirable nor economically useful. On the other hand, there was a notable expansion in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>21</sup> C. E. Dankert, "Efficiency and Unemployment," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 137, February 1932, p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> C. E. Dankert, "Work and Leisure," pp. 240-242.

<sup>23</sup> C.E. Dankert, "Unemployment and Machinery," *Dalhousie Review*, October 1933, p. 314.

discussion of the goal of economic effort beyond production and an acknowledgment of more consumerist ends, albeit rooted in expanded leisure time and personal development rather than in material satisfactions. On either side of this mainstream a considerable number of economists, on both the left and the right, linked the weakness of the economy with the moral weakness of Canadians in an age of plenty.<sup>24</sup> The length and depth of the depression would gradually undercut the cultural critique implicit in all of these analyses, shifting attention from working class purchases of the wrong sorts of goods to the more basic challenges of purchasing necessities.<sup>25</sup>

### Outside of the Economic Community

Increasing industrialization had been accompanied by increasing political agitation around the themes of unemployment, inequality, distribution, and monopoly.<sup>26</sup> New political parties emerged, insisting that prosperity should not be seen as a function

<sup>24</sup> Banking expert and University of Toronto professor Gilbert Jackson charged that the "root cause of the depression lies in no fault of this economic mechanism...but in ourselves." The depression—the outcome of greed and rampant speculation—proved that economics was "an exemplification of the moral law." The solution lay in the "ruthless balancing of all budgets." Gilbert Jackson, *An Economist's Confession of Faith* (Toronto, 1935), pp. 29, 33-34, 51, cited in Doug Owsam, "Economic thought in the 1930s: The Prelude to Keynesianism" in R. Blake and J. Keshen (ed.) *Social Welfare Policy in Canada*, (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995), pp. 184, 194. Political economists associated with the *Machine Age* series of publications sponsored by the Social Service Council of Canada argued that high standards of living had been acquired at the cost of increasing economic insecurity. In this case, the belief that society rested in the final analysis on what one economist termed individual "moral fibre" meant that demands for state intervention were cast in terms of preserving traditional ideals of community and serving the enlargement of personal liberty by increasing economic security. The restoration of social harmony, the creation of a stable economy (rather than an abundance of goods), and personal fulfillment realized by "joining joyfully in the search for higher values and finer interests" would repair the economy and society. George Britnell and Irene Biss, respectively, cited in Gauvreau and Christie, pp. 218-220, 343-344.

<sup>25</sup> Donohue, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> Irving Brecher, *Monetary and Fiscal Thought and Policy in Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 221, discusses increasing agitation as the counterpart of industrialization.

of bankers' statements and corporate profits but as a reflection of the general conditions of ordinary Canadians. "[W]hen they are prosperous, only then, can we say we are in a state of prosperity" cautioned Abraham Heaps, the Member of Parliament for the Labour Party.<sup>27</sup> These alternative voices came from fundamentally producerist orientations, but argued that changes in the scale and method of production in large-scale industry and agriculture had altered the dynamics of the world economy. Explanations for the under-consumption of manufactured goods and services by ordinary Canadians varied, but inadequate domestic consumer purchasing power was regarded, not as a symptom, but as the cause of the depression. Heaps, for example, argued that the presence of "want in the midst of plenty"<sup>28</sup> was due in large part to the gap between wages and prices. "As a nation . . . we are wealthier than ever before in our history. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, the more bread we have the more breadlines there are. The more clothes we manufacture, the more people there are without clothes. The more homes we build, the more there are looking for shelter. The more wealth we produce, the greater is the poverty."<sup>29</sup> Raising wages would enable workers to buy back the goods they produced. Unemployment insurance, which Heaps argued should be adopted primarily for reasons of social welfare and social justice, it was noted, also had the potential to stabilize the economy. J. S. Woodsworth offered a similar observation, explaining that

more goods are being produced than can be bought back with the resources at the disposal of the consumers. . . one trouble with the world today is that there has been . . . too much thrift; that on account of the unequal division of wealth the people who so very largely control the processes of manufacture, distribution, and exchange, are able to retain in

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Heaps, Hansard, February 20, 1928, cited in Leo Heaps, *The Rebel in the House* (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, 1984), p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.



their own hands a great part of what is produced; that, not being able themselves to consume this large quantity, they are forced to ...plough it back into business... The result is that they develop still greater plant equipment which, in turn, produces an increasing volume of goods. . . On the other hand, we have not adequate buying power on the part of the masses of people.<sup>30</sup>

William Irvine, active in both the labour movement and the United Farmers of Alberta, argued that the problem was largely monetary and the solution could be found in the Social Credit theories of Major Douglas. Fiscal reform would bring the consumer's ability to purchase goods into equilibrium with society's ability to manufacture goods. In articles prepared for *Canadian Forum* in 1925, Douglas, an engineer rather than an economist, stressed that the definition of wealth lay not in the mere production of goods and series conducive to well-being, but in the rate at which the Nation could deliver those goods and services to the individuals who made up the Nation.<sup>31</sup> The key to improving delivery, according to Douglas, was to use the money system to correct artificial deficiencies of purchasing power created by the present financial system. Irvine argued as well that capitalism, "cannot go on without foreign markets, and there are not sufficient foreign markets in the world to take delivery of all the goods which the industrialized world is capable of producing."<sup>32</sup> It was critical, therefore, to find some way of placing our people in a position to purchase the necessities of life. Put an end to underconsumption, ... and industry will soon be humming. Make consumption possible,

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Brecher, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Major C. H. Douglas, "Government by Finance and Its Remedy, Part I. The Disease," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. V, No. 28, July 1925, p. 296. See also Major C. H. Douglas, "Government by Finance and Its Remedy, Part II. The Remedy," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. V, No. 29, August 1925.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Brecher, p. 93.

and production will look after itself."<sup>33</sup>

Labour activist and prolific columnist Colin McKay took a different approach, arguing that the supply of credit was beside the point. The debate as to whether the volume of credit determined the volume of production, or vice-versa, he suggested was a question "of not much greater practical importance than that as to whether the egg or the hen came first."<sup>34</sup> Because the production of consumptive goods had already surpassed the capacity of the markets to absorb them, most enterprises were not seeking additional credit. The problem, McKay explained, was the "gearing of the economic machine" which prevented the maintenance of a proper balance between production and consumption. McKay proposed that investment in capital goods be rationed in order to make a greater share of the national income available for the purchase of consumptive goods. With consumption balancing production, the stability of business would be ensured.

Together these understandings formed what economist Irving Brecher described as a "loose admixture of generalities"<sup>35</sup> rather than a consistent, uniform analysis, but it was one which returned again and again to the problem of under-consumption, and "the phenomenon," as Woodsworth put it, "of a great deal more being produced than people could purchase . . ."<sup>36</sup> The economy seemed imbalanced, with surpluses in production highlighting the struggles of so many working class families, seemingly denied the basic necessities of life by an economic system oriented to profits. As unemployment rose,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Colin McKay, "Rationing Investment." *Canadian Forum*, Volume 12, No. 142, July 1932, p. 372.

<sup>35</sup> Brecher, p. 92.

<sup>36</sup> J. S. Woodsworth, *Debates*, House of Commons, Ottawa, April 1, 1930, II, p. 1149.

calls for the right to work were supplemented by campaigns for the right to adequate consumption. Only government, it was believed, had the strength to offset the power of industry.

As the depression deepened, younger economists began to express similar concerns, struggling to explain the relationship between economic theory and the visible sufferings around them. Within the mainstream of economic thinking there was more support for over-production than under-consumption as an explanation for the depression. In 1932, William B. Hurd of Brandon College observed that large-scale production lowered costs only if plants operated at or near capacity, greatly increasing the pressure on business management to maintain continuous operation. In order to maintain cash flow and reduce labour turnover, producers might ignore declining demand and continue to increase supply. Additional improvements in productivity, traditionally the salvation of businesses with profits under pressure, offered no solution.<sup>37</sup> The superior efficiency of mass production had proven to be at once a blessing and a curse. The living standards of the masses had been elevated to new high levels, but internal strains and stresses were appearing that threatened the economic and population structures of the most advanced nations. For economists such as Hurd, the solution was less a matter of increasing wages and purchasing power than the restoration of international trade and the more stringent co-ordination of production with markets.

At the University of Toronto, economist Harold Innis explored a similar line of thought, considering the rigidities that constrained the entire national economy. Emphasizing trade as the principal moving force in the development of new regions,

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<sup>37</sup> W. B. Hurd, "The Dilemma of Mass Production," *Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association*, Vol. 39, No. 2, January 1932.

Innis wrote that the opportunities for profit which mobilized investment in the earliest stages of a nation's history continued to shape its economy. In order to participate in trade, it was necessary to create a costly infrastructure of railroads and harbours. Canada's infrastructure of transportation and hydro-electric power had required enormous initial investments of capital that in many cases required the support of the state. Geography and climate increased the overhead costs and restricted the amount of time each year available to pay debts down. High overhead costs necessitated the expansion of power production to capacity and encouraged the fullest exploitation of national resources. Moreover, the building of this infrastructure, from the settlement of the West to the opening of Northern Ontario, involved a large burden of debt to foreign capital markets. Given enough time, domestic markets might have developed, but the tendency was to exploit resources until they were depleted without giving rise to further stages of development. In any case, with regions and classes pitted against each other in "scramble for development," little attention had been paid to building an integrated and independent economy. Industry had largely sacrificed Canada's domestic market in its concentration on foreign markets. Tariffs, by protecting obsolescence, delayed necessary change. The internal population of Canada was insufficient to consume the output of industries which the nation had spent decades and millions of dollars to build. Because there was little need for new capital projects in the years ahead, the problem would become even worse. The result was an economy with widely fluctuating income and highly rigid expenses.<sup>38</sup> It was possible, Innis acknowledged, for the government to

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<sup>38</sup> H. A. Innis, "Introduction," in H. A. Innis and A. F. W. Plumptre (ed.), *The Canadian Economy and its Problems* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1934), pp. 3-24.



intervene to create national systems of production and exchange, binding regional fragments—each geared to foreign markets—together into a more stable, inwardly focused economy. However, the process would be slow and complete self-sufficiency was not practical.

Canadian economists were familiar with the discussions taking place in other nations. Innis, for example, referenced the writings of British economist John Maynard Keynes who argued that, for Britain, the advantages of coordinating production and consumption within the nation and “of gradually bringing the producer and the consumer within the ambit of the same national economic and financial organization,” outweighed the costs of national self sufficiency.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, he noted that American economist E. A. Robinson asserted that the size of that country’s domestic market was so large that, in many instances, little advantage would be obtained by adding foreign markets and further increasing the scale of production.<sup>40</sup>

There was a growing realization that, in the most developed countries primary and manufactured products played a smaller relative part in the national economy. However, Innis believed that these theories and policies were not useful for Canada. Economic nationalism designed to obtain stability and security by restricting the production of goods, was a problematic policy in an economy that had developed for export and trade. The goods Canada produced in abundance needed foreign markets. For Canada, Innis famously concluded, industrialism “has produced an abundance of goods, but not the first luxury of security.”<sup>41</sup> Canada’s prosperity was dependent upon the consumption choices

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. The effort to develop made in Canada economic theory can be understood

of other nations.

Innis's understanding of the limits of the Canadian economy was widely shared. The publication of study group meetings held in 1933 and 1934 containing the views of many of the countries leading young thinkers in political economy and banking revealed considerable consensus as to the limited means available to revitalize depressed economies and their general unsuitability for the Canadian situation. A. F. W. Plumptre, an associate professor at the University of Toronto, was one of many speakers who argued that the key to Canadian economic conditions lay in the primary industries rather than in the capital-goods or construction industries that British and American economists were examining as a means to economic revival.<sup>42</sup> In Canada, Plumptre explained, public works could have a "palliative" function in addressing the problems of unemployment, but were unlikely to start a stream of purchasing power flowing again. Unless fixed charges were reduced or the sale of primary products increased, the prospects for prosperity were limited and unlikely to warrant new investment. Similarly, Plumptre acknowledged that monetary policies aimed at the expansion of credit could help to support Canadian incomes but insisted that they would not stimulate foreign demand for Canadian staples. Reducing the burden of debt would help, but raised constitutional issues insofar as this required overturning existing contracts. The best opportunity for

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as another example of the antimodern nationalisms of the twenties, marking Canada off from Britain and America by the rejection of universalizing processes of mass production and mass consumption. Economic theory, in other words, paralleled other cultural efforts that located the origins of Canada in nature and before industrialization. Benedict Anderson, "Staging Antimodernism in the Age of High Capitalist Nationalism," in Lynda Jessup (ed), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> A. F. W. Plumptre, "Canadian Monetary Policy," Innis and A. F. W. Plumptre (ed.), pp. 159-170.

progress, short of a European or Asiatic war, he offered, was a combination of exchange rate depreciation and public works to moderate the effects of the depression until growth was restarted by external forces.<sup>43</sup>

H. R. Jackman, representing the banking and securities industries, concluded that a Keynesian style program of public works, together with interest rate cuts, might help to revive the economy but insisted that the primary challenge for growth was to get capital to flow into industry.<sup>44</sup> In a major depression, Jackman argued, the cost of money was less critical than the lack of profits and potential profits. Uncertainty and glut discouraged investment. Interest rate cuts, while helpful, were unlikely to be sufficient to stimulate the economy. Public works projects were useful on a number of social grounds: they were morally beneficial, prevented the decline of skills of the labour force, and provided wages. Over time the spending of wages would use up the oversupply of production, but Jackman was skeptical that these measures would be sufficient to stimulate new investment in primary industry sufficient to restore growth. Taken together low interest rates and public works might set Canada on the road to prosperity—but only if timed to coincide with recovery in America.

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<sup>43</sup> F. W. Burton, a participating graduate student in economics at the University of Toronto, drew similar conclusions when addressing the topic of "The Business Cycle and the Problem of Economic Policy." Canada was a country of small population dependent for prosperity upon other countries of larger populations. Public expenditures would relieve unemployment but could not provoke new flows of private investment. "We can achieve equilibrium by ourselves," Burton wrote, "but not a boom." Keynes' formula of economic nationalism, he later noted, "has nothing at present to offer Canada." F. W. Burton, "The Business Cycle and the Problem of Economic Policy," *Ibid.*, p. 156. F. W. Burton, "Review of 'Public Life, July and September 1936' by W. H. Moore," in *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Nov. 1936), p. 599.

<sup>44</sup> H. R. Jackman, "Investment and Public Works," H. A. Innis and A. F. W. Plumptre (ed.), p. 156.

"Other member in attendance remained unconvinced, noting, for example that the country was already carrying a significant burden of debt from infrastructure investments. The key problem in Canada, it was agreed, was not the absence of manufacturing and construction jobs but the price spread between what the primary producer earned and the cost of manufactured goods. Monetary and public works policies, in this context, were described as "simply gambling upon the likelihood that forces outside Canadian control would operate sufficiently rapidly to save the situation."<sup>45</sup>

This is not to say that those present were unwilling to intervene in the economy. Indeed they recommended the creation of a national economic council to undertake "organized thinking" and social and economic planning. However, it was also clear that at the midpoint of the depression most of the nation's professional and academic economists, while accepting the need for planning, did not believe that increasing consumer spending within Canada would end the depression for Canada. American and British policy makers saw increasing purchasing power as the key to recovery; their Canadian peers believed that Canada's economy, at a different stage of development, required external markets for growth, conceding only that increased consumer spending would be helpful in stabilizing economy until exports returned. The potential for a self-contained economy driven by mass consumption and investment oriented toward the consumer market was seen as limited. For this reason economic thinkers believed, as Innis expressed it, that Canadian problems could not be answered in terms of the economics of older countries.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>46</sup> H. A. Innis, *Staples, Markets and Cultural Change: Selected Essays of Harold Innis*, ed. Daniel Drache, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's, 1995), p. xxxiv.



For the intellectual community, the middle years of the depression were a time of study groups and summer schools, of like-minded men and women coming together to consider the crisis from the relative safety of academia, government and the upper ranks of business. The study group organized by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs in 1933-1934 was only one of a number of similar events, including those organized by the Liberal and Conservative Parties. The formation of the reform oriented League for Social Reconstruction was, in its origins, another example. The urgency of calls to plan, expressed even by those who recognized that the recovery of Canada's economy would be largely determined by external factors, suggests that the tremendous need for control and regulation should be recognized in part as an emotional response to broad uncertainties and not merely a reasoned response to economic crisis. The call for investigation and the progressive extension of order, in other words, for the politics of control, emerged in counterpoint to the apparent chaos of unregulated exchange.

The advance of consumer interests, and particularly of consumer attitudes was seen by at least one economist to have come about in tandem with the expansion of planning. "Whither are we drifting?" asked University of Toronto political economist E. J. Urwick, giving voice to the unease and uncertainty so many shared.<sup>47</sup> In the face of public pressure for more protection, more supervision and more services, Urwick believed that government was transforming into a "Universal Service Organization." "WANTING things" had replaced thinking about things. Urwick worried that this "unlimited and illimitable" demand for more would inevitably lead to remote and autocratic methods of control and supervision that were ultimately incompatible with

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<sup>47</sup> E. J. Urwick, "Whither Are We Drifting?" *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 15, July 1935, p. 306.

responsive democratic government. On one level, then, the contrast between the understandings of populist politicians associated with farmers and workers (who discussed mass consumption as a solution to the depression), and the understandings of professional economists (most of whom not only advocated planning but called for constitutional reform to enable more comprehensive control), was marked. Read from a different perspective, however, both sought solutions in the distribution of goods and the control of markets, convinced that the modern economy required state intervention if the forces of production and consumption were to be held in balance.

### **Preparing for an Election**

On the surface the election of 1935 changed little. The Liberal majority was won on the basis of a platform that made few concrete promises. But from another perspective, the discourse that preceded the election was critical in articulating new possibilities. Although great changes did not arise directly from the election, an examination of party platforms and election rhetoric shows the emergence of new themes and new agendas in Canadian political discourse. The strands of thought and policy that would reshape post-war Canada were identified. Many noted that a limit or turning point had been reached. There was a general agreement that "the problem of winning from nature the means of satisfying human needs has been solved," but tremendous uncertainty about what this meant. Few doubted that it was physically possible for Canada to provide a comfortable life for every citizen. As one observer commented, "is not all our trouble the exact opposite—the insuperable difficulty of disposing of all our produce?"<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately the election renewed Canada's commitment to capitalism; however,

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<sup>48</sup> Logic, "A Social Absurdity," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 15, January 1935, p. 163.

within this renewed commitment the balance between producer and consumer interests had been "recalibrated."<sup>49</sup> The responsibilities of government became linked with the ability of Canadians to maintain a decent standard of living through purchases in the marketplace, regardless of where purchasing power originated. Finally, the nature of the election itself, with its multiplicity of new parties, pointed to dramatic changes underway. As traditional loyalties weakened, new groups appeared, determined to influence how the distributive mechanisms available to government should be utilized to build a stronger nation. These shifts in discourse suggest that the depression should be understood as a crisis of values as much as an economic crisis.

By the fall of 1935 every party agreed on the need for change and sought to present itself as a party of reform. The difference was how fast and how dramatic change would be. In the end, the party that promised the slowest degree of change won the election. However, within ten years policies fundamental to support the advance of a consumer-driven economy were being put in place. The election gave interest groups an opportunity to crystallize their understanding of the economy and present their vision of the nation in the form of platforms and policy recommendations, whether endorsing or resisting the changes underway. It also provided a measure of how far Canadian understandings shifted towards a new consensus, one that emphasized the increasing importance of distribution and consumption over production.

### **Creating a Co-operative Commonwealth**

In 1932 long time reform leader J. S. Woodsworth proposed in the House of

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<sup>49</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, "The New Deal State and the Making of Citizen Consumers," in *Getting and Spending*, in Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, Mattias Judt (ed), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 115.

Commons the first of what would become an annual resolution to establish a co-operative commonwealth.<sup>50</sup> In making this motion, Woodsworth recognized that the capitalist system had "a great many achievements to its credit. . . .I think it is generally conceded that under this system the problem of production is very largely solved. . . .Undoubtedly the general standard of living has been substantially raised under this system."<sup>51</sup> The problem, Woodsworth argued, lay in the inherent defects of a system that required expanding markets for disposing of surplus products and expanding investment opportunities for surplus capital. Having, "reached the stage where the great mass of the people do not seem to be in a position to buy back what has been produced," the system had "stalled."<sup>52</sup> Capitalism was not simply unjust, it no longer functioned. The solution Woodsworth proposed was for the government to set up "a co-operative commonwealth in which all natural resources and the socially necessary machinery of production would be used in the interests of the people."<sup>53</sup> Production would be geared to consumption. At the time few were willing to speak to the motion, and the House adjourned without voting, leaving the matter open for future discussion.

The summer of 1933 was the low point of the depression. Representatives of the

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<sup>50</sup> Noted in Walter Young, *The Anatomy of a Party* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 240-241. The motion read: "Whereas under our present economic arrangement large numbers of our people are unemployed and without the means of earning a livelihood for themselves and their dependents; and whereas the prevalence of the present depression throughout the world indicated fundamental defects in the existing economic system; be it therefore resolved: that in the opinion of this House the government should immediately take measures looking to the setting up of a cooperative commonwealth in which all natural resources and the socially necessary machinery of production will be used in the interests of the people and not for the benefit of the few." *House of Commons Debates*, March 2, 1932, p. 726.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 727.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 728.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 739.



more radical farmer and labour parties met with supporters in Calgary in a pragmatic effort to consolidate reform forces. A new party was formed and named the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, recognizing over a decade of discussion by various radical groups who sometimes shared little beyond a common aspiration for social justice and a vision of brotherhood rooted in the more equitable division of wealth.<sup>54</sup> In brackets after its name were the words "Labour, Farmer, Socialist," suggesting that the depression had aligned economic interests among the founding groups without entirely dissolving their ideological differences.<sup>55</sup> The following February, when Woodsworth once again presented his resolution to the House, it was addressed by a succession of CCF speakers and supporters. The formation of a third party with potentially widespread appeal also guaranteed that the motion would attract attention from other parties.

The first to speak in support was Agnes Macphail, representing the United Farmers of Ontario. "We must," she insisted, "now turn our whole attention upon the consumption of goods. . . We must pass at once from an economy of production to an economy of consumption and we must continue to address ourselves to that problem until the consumption of goods equals that of production." The whole effort of government in the past, she asserted, had been towards the production of goods. Now she called upon government to shift its efforts and devise new policies of taxation, finance and trade which would increase consumption. Macphail also discussed the burden of federal taxes which she argued should be taken "as much as possible off the backs of the consumers so as to increase their purchasing power" and shifted to capital, which she described as the

<sup>54</sup> See discussion in Anthony Mardios, *William Irvine, The Life of a Prairie Radical* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1979), pp. 183-184.

<sup>55</sup> Young, pp. 13-28, details the steps leading up to the Calgary conference.

"unspent balances" of individuals and corporations.<sup>56</sup> Consumption would be increased by shifting wealth from those who invested it "in plant and equipment to produce goods of which there are clearly too much" to those who would spend it.

Next to address the Commons was G. G. Coote. A former clergyman and long time social reformer, he began by evoking images of poverty in the midst of plenty:

We find a land where food is more plentiful than it has ever been before; yet many people are going hungry. We find great quantities of clothing in the warehouses and in the retail stores; yet I personally know of many people who are going insufficiently clad. . . . There is a vast amount of coal in Canada and any number of miners who are willing and anxious to work; yet there are thousands of homes in the country in which the furnaces are not being lit this winter. . . . We have goods and services of all kinds in abundance . . . but the people are not in a position to obtain anything like a sufficient quantity of things.<sup>57</sup>

While Macphail had emphasized reforms to the tax system as the key to solving the problem of distribution, Coote spoke about monetary policy, calling upon the government to increase the money supply by issuing additional currency to match the needs of the economy. Many people, said Coote, misunderstood the meaning of money. "They think it is something to be saved, something to be hoarded, something to be bought and sold, a commodity like wheat or potatoes. Money is nothing of the kind. In the true sense of the word it is a medium of exchange, a system of tickets whereby we exchange goods and service one for another. . . . money is the most important thing in our lives . . . . The whole standard of living of our people depends upon the amount of money they control."<sup>58</sup> Increasing the supply of money would increase the purchasing power of Canadians in the most direct way possible. Insofar as inflating the money supply would

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<sup>56</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, February 1, 1933, p. 1697.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1699.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1699.

also have the effect of depreciating current wealth, a policy of inflation would also reduce the gap between rich and poor.

Subsequent speakers in support of the ideal of a co-operative federation similarly noted that the country had goods in abundance. Calling for the reallocation of wealth from capitalists to consumers, the co-ordination of production to meet consumption needs, and new monetary policies that would increase the availability of cash and credit, they all insisted that public welfare, loosely associated with the increased consumption of goods, should be substituted for profit as the goal of the Canadian economic system.

### **The Liberal Response**

The effort to consolidate energies for political reform under the banner of the CCF represented a clear threat to the Liberal party, pressuring a reluctant Mackenzie King to move beyond generalized expressions of social concern and prepare a statement of policies that would define the party's position on major issues.<sup>59</sup> When King spoke on the Woodsworth resolution late in February, he used the opportunity not only to address the motion but also to present the platform that would guide the Liberal party in the next election. King expressed considerable sympathy for the social concerns of the new party and agreed that the "great question" of the day was "the problem of how masses of people are to live."<sup>60</sup> He emphasized that the Liberal party shared the CCF's sympathy for humanitarian reform, but rejected the extension of state management, both on grounds of efficacy and liberty. The practical challenges of government management of the economy were insurmountable. The opportunity for profit, which King described as the reward for

<sup>59</sup> H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1932-1939, The Prism of Unity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 28-30.

<sup>60</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, February 27, 1933, p. 2505.

services rendered to the community, provided both incentive and direction to the economy. For these reasons King argued that it was necessary to separate the CCF's goals from the means proposed to achieve them. Furthermore, he insisted, if the problem of distribution had become more important than that of production, it was due to the fundamental success, rather than the failures of capitalism. While the problem of distribution may be a difficult one, he explained, echoing in part the words of the CCF caucus

we are very fortunate that it is the one major problem in connection with the matter we are considering, and that we do not have to consider as another major problem, that of production itself. Fortunately the problem of production in a large measure has been solved under the so-called and much berated capitalist system. To-day there is plenty . . . so far as industry is concerned with production that part of the problem presents little in the way of difficulty. That part has already been largely solved.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike the CCF, however, King argued that the existence of plenty was the result of capitalism and the system of private property and competition. The system of socialism advocated by the CCF, he insisted, would almost certainly reverse this pattern of progress by reducing production. While the CCF believed that production and consumption could be separated from capitalism and entirely directed by management, King argued that capital was a necessary partner in industrial production. The state did not have the ability to effectively organize and direct a complex industrial system.<sup>62</sup> The problem of distribution, however, was not so much economic as technical and "simply comes down to a matter of the sufficient understanding of the forces at work and how to control them."<sup>63</sup> While committed to laissez-faire principles in production, King saw a

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2501, 2505.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2505.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2505.



limited opportunity for intervention in distribution. Finally, King argued that the depression, far from being the result of the breakdown of the system, was "man-made" by those who refused to share their prosperity. Social problems, he reiterated, required a change of heart, not a change in the structure of the economy.<sup>64</sup>

In the final portion of his address, King was careful to distinguish between the immediate crisis of the depression which he agreed required government intervention, and the long term needs of the country for economic stability, which he asserted required minimizing government involvement.<sup>65</sup> Beyond the restoration of parliamentary rights and the repeal of Section 98 (which barred gatherings for the purpose of change in government, industry or the economy through the use or encouragement of force), the Liberal program of social reform was modest, involving non-specific commitments for greater equality in the distribution of wealth and a stronger voice for labour and the consumer in industrial relations. King's vision remained much as it had been, calling not for changes in capitalism but for the amelioration, as necessary, of its abuses. Against the CCF's promise of an increased government intervention in the service of a consumer oriented economy, the Liberals would continue to support a capitalist economy as the best means to increase the availability of goods and services to Canadians.

Both the Liberals and the CCF prepared campaign materials based on these debates. King's address was reprinted in pamphlet form with its key points itemized to form an election platform and became the standard of reference in the upcoming election

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, February 27, 1933, pp. 2501-2502.

<sup>65</sup> J. M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power, Canada's Federal Elections* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 208.

campaign.<sup>66</sup> William Irvine did much the same for the CCF, using the opportunity to reassure party members and prospective voters that the principle of socialization would be applied only to the means of production and the nation's natural resources. A Co-operative Commonwealth, he promised, "not only does not mean taking private property from the people, but adding a great deal more to what they have. . . . What we really want is to see every individual have more private property. . . . Our motto," he proposed, "might well be stated as 'More private property to all and no public property for any individual.'"<sup>67</sup> Emphasizing stability over growth, the party proposed to eliminate the cycle of boom and bust. Planning would co-ordinate production and consumption, reducing the problems of over-production which were in large part responsible for the depression. The Liberal Party, in comparison, continued to embrace an economy geared toward growth rooted in the profit motive and the exploitation of natural resources, insisting that the well-being of Canadians would follow from the success of business.

### **The Conservative Platform**

In 1930 Bennett and the Conservative party had won power by promising to "blast" Canada's way into the world's markets and restore prosperity and jobs. Policies in the first years of the mandate were those traditionally adopted in times of economic recession: tariffs were raised to protect domestic manufacturers, preferences negotiated to facilitate increases in foreign trade, and efforts made to control the budget deficit and

<sup>66</sup> Neatby notes that King was convinced "that he had struck the necessary balance. In future, when correspondents criticized the party for having no clear statement of its policies, King merely mailed them a copy." Neatby, p. 38. In January 1935 King responded to the throne speech by rereading his address from Hansard of 1933 back into the record, describing them as the policies upon which the General Election would be fought. *Canadian Annual Review*, 1935-1936, pp. 14-15.

<sup>67</sup> William Irvine, *Political Servants of Capitalism* (Ottawa: Labour Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 80-81.

preserve a sound currency. To the extent that the collapse of markets was seen as a problem subject to domestic solution, the government raised tariffs, authorized campaigns aimed at restoring confidence, and exhorted consumers to buy "Canada First."<sup>68</sup> However, as *Canadian Forum* pointed out, for ordinary Canadians Canada First was a "Consumer Last" policy because protected markets encouraged high prices.<sup>69</sup> The government argued that the benefits of preserving home markets for Canadian manufacturers would trickle down to workers and farmers in the form of jobs and wages; however, even when encouraging programs of "Buying Canadian," the party maintained that the bulk of the economy was dependent upon exports. Canada could not, it was emphasized, afford to adopt American style programs that reduced hours and raised wages regardless of international competitiveness. The Canadian market, Bennett explained, of "ten and a half million people [was] . . . only a drop in the world bucket."<sup>70</sup>

From 1930 to 1933, Bennett undertook a variety of initiatives to expand international markets for Canada's primary resources. In the face of limited success, the government turned in 1933 and 1934 to new policies aimed at managing the supply of goods coming on to the market, implying in effect that the depression was a matter of over-production rather than under-consumption. These efforts included collaboration in international efforts to buy up surplus silver and restrict the production of wheat, and the

<sup>68</sup> Larry Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: the politics of the Conservative Party under R. B. Bennett, 1927 – 1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992), p. 113. In one instance Bennett agreed to be filmed making a short speech in support of "Canadian Prosperity Week," an event organized by Famous Players to restore confidence and "banish the so-called business depression" that would be played nightly at every Paramount theatre in Canada. *Canadian Forum*, Vol. II, No. 122. November 1930. p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> *Canadian Forum*, Vol. XI, No. 123, December 1930, p. 84.

<sup>70</sup> The Liberal-Conservative Summer School, *Canadian Problems as seen by Twenty Outstanding Men of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 31.

passage of the Natural Products Marketing Act (1934) that gave Canada's producers the ability to control and regulate the marketing of their products. In the face of declining exports and shrinking markets, the government proposed strategies of supply management, encouraging monopolies to reduce competition, control production and fix prices. Unable to increase demand, the government would try to reduce supply, curtailing production to increase profits. Insofar as these efforts recognized the importance of consumption, it was from the producers' perspective, without acknowledging consumer interests in cheaper goods or higher wages.

### **The Problem of Price Spreads**

Early in January 1934 Prime Minister Bennett asked Trade and Commerce Minister H. H. Stevens to fulfill a speaking engagement for him at a convention of retail boot and shoe merchants.<sup>71</sup> Stevens used the occasion to launch an aggressive attack on big business. If old-time free-enterprise no longer worked, Stevens insisted that it was because "the unscrupulous and cold-blooded" leaders of business and industry had prospered at the expense of the people, abusing their power to undermine the small businessmen who were "the true basis of democracy."<sup>72</sup> While some dismissed his accusations as a "witch hunt,"<sup>73</sup> they received wide publicity. The problem, as Stevens presented it, was that monopolies of production and distribution disadvantaged small businessmen, independent farmers and industrial workers in their producer as well as in their consumer roles. Canada Packers was exploiting farmers by driving down the price of beef. Chains like Tamblyns drugstores were using loss leaders to drive neighbourhood

<sup>71</sup> *Canadian Annual Review*, 1934, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Glassford, p. 139.

<sup>73</sup> Vincent Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen, Memoirs of a Political Economist* (Toronto: Scarborough College, 1978), p. 60.



stores out of business. Simpson's had sold shares to the public at the top of the market. Eaton's exploited dressmakers in order to keep prices low. Oppressed by combinations and big business, the independent worker and small businessman could no longer sell their products or their labour at prices that enabled them to buy the necessities of a decent standard of living. The natural balance between production and consumption had been disrupted. Not only had working conditions deteriorated, hard work—being a producer—no longer ensured the ability to consume. The economy was no longer able to fulfill its traditional moral function.

In the face of rising public indignation and demands for action, a parliamentary committee was appointed with a mandate to "investigate the causes of the large spread between the prices received for commodities by the producer thereof, and the price paid by the consumers therefore," the effect of mass buying by chain and department stores on labour and wage conditions, and the marketing and distribution of agricultural products.<sup>74</sup> Stevens was to be the chair. The hearings, which continued throughout the low years of the depression and most of the pre-election period, were extremely popular. Politicians, leaders of industry and members of the public sat in on the sessions. The testimony of witnesses was published in the daily press. As evidence of exploitation, price manipulation, sweatshop conditions and unethical business practices mounted, Stevens' personal reputation as the people's hero grew. While some of the attention was due to his aggressive questioning of witnesses, it was obvious that the investigation had hit a nerve.

The inquiry highlighted fundamental economic changes that Canadians were certainly aware of but had not previously considered in detail. While the depression had

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<sup>74</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Price Spreads and Mass Buying* (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1937), p. xxvi.

not caused these changes, it had thrown them "into bold and challenging relief."<sup>75</sup> The economies of scale introduced by mass production and the collapse of commodity prices meant that distribution and commercial costs now made up a larger percentage of the total costs of goods. While increased competition and shrinking markets squeezed all retailers, they tended to favour the mass producer and the mass merchandiser over the small independents.<sup>76</sup> As the commission itself noted, "these were fundamentally the problems of a transitional economy in which simple competition still prevailed in some parts, monopoly had succeeded it in others and monopolistic or imperfect competition characterized the rest."<sup>77</sup> Conditions of large-scale industry had significantly altered the dynamic between production and consumption. The inquiry revealed conflicts between the new American-style model of mass production-mass consumption with distributive processes that relied upon national chains, high volume, high turn-over and low prices; and the old business model with independently owned, community based enterprises rooted in personal contact, low volumes, and mutually understood sense of value. For many Canadians these changes came to symbolize the dislocations of modernity. In a very practical way, they challenged existing arrangements of distribution, the interests embodied in them and the social structure associated with them. The modernization of production and distribution tended to pit the large against the small, the organized against the unorganized. As criticism of the mass production economy mounted, support for independent workers grew. Small business, rooted in the home and family, was regarded

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9. For a useful discussion of responses to similar trends in European economies see Victoria de Grazia, "Changing Consumption Regimes in Europe, 1930-1970: Comparative Perspectives on the Distribution Problem," in *Getting and Spending*, pp. 61-78.

<sup>77</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission*, p. 6.

as morally superior to big business, willing to exploit individual Canadians for profit.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike previous inquiries into working conditions, the Price Spreads Inquiry turned the spotlight on problems individual Canadians faced as consumers as well as the challenges they faced as workers. In that most Canadians participated in the marketplace both as consumers and as producers, freedom was no longer an "issue concerned with the protection of political rights but rather with the right of those engaged in various processes of production and distribution to obtain an adequate return for their efforts."<sup>79</sup>

Social democracy was seen to involve not only the right to vote but also the right to participate in society as a consumer of goods and services. In the struggle to attain a decent standard of living, the rights of the worker and the rights to consume goods and services began to converge.<sup>80</sup> The inquiry was by far the most popular initiative undertaken by the Conservative government.<sup>81</sup> When parliament was prorogued in July, an order in council transformed the committee into a Royal Commission, again to be chaired by Stevens. Increasingly Stevens' impassioned attacks on the practices of big business were creating tensions within the Conservative party, especially at the cabinet level where links with Canada's business community were strong. The breaking point was reached over the summer when Steven's impassioned speech to a Conservative study club found its way into the press. Having made specific accusations that could not be substantiated, Stevens was forced to resign as chair of the Commission, although he retained his seat in the House and his Conservative party membership. The incident

<sup>78</sup> Monod, pp. 286-287.

<sup>79</sup> D. McArthur, "Public Affairs," *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Summer 1934, p. 256.

<sup>80</sup> Cohen discusses this in the American context, focusing primarily on the convergence of consumers and voters. Lizabeth Cohen, "The New Deal State and the Making of Citizen Consumers," in *Getting and Spending*.

<sup>81</sup> Glassford, p. 149.

confirmed Stevens' standing as the people's hero as well as Bennett's image as the champion of capitalism and opened the door to the emergence of a new political party led by Stevens.<sup>82</sup>

### **The New Deal Speeches**

With an election looming and Conservative party prospects crumbling, Bennett decided to act. "The old order is gone," Bennett announced in a dramatic address to the nation on the evening of January 2, 1935. "It will not return. We are living amidst conditions which are new and strange to us."<sup>83</sup> In a series of five radio broadcasts, Bennett spoke to the nation, insisting that free competition and the open marketplace had vanished, that the "old time doctrine"<sup>84</sup> of laissez-faire was no longer relevant, and that the only substitute for them was government regulation and control. Bennett boldly proclaimed that "the conditions under which capitalism was born and grew powerful have changed. Therefore capitalism must change to meet the changed conditions of this new world."<sup>85</sup> At the same time, he maintained "I cannot bring myself to agree that there is anything radically wrong with the system which adjustment and reform will not remedy."<sup>86</sup> Reform, he claimed, meant "progress, security, prosperity and happiness," it also offered "the salvation of the system."<sup>87</sup> Bennett largely reaffirmed conservative beliefs in the merits of production, while arguing that the benefits of improved techniques

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<sup>82</sup> Glassford, p. 153

<sup>83</sup> *The Premier Speaks to the People, The Prime Minister's January Radio Broadcasts issued in book form, The First Address* (Ottawa: Dominion Conservative Headquarters, 1935), p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> *The Premier Speaks to the People, The Prime Minister's January Radio Broadcasts issued in book form, The Second Address* (Ottawa: Dominion Conservative Headquarters, 1935), p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



should be more broadly available with security provided to all who were "willing to work as a member of our economic society."<sup>88</sup> The right of every Canadian to a decent standard of living was acknowledged, but continued to be associated with their productive contribution to society.

Bennett emphasized exports as the principle driver of the Canadian economy, but saw limited potential for external market growth during the depression. To compensate the government devised policies to manage the supply of goods, including limiting production and improving the quality of agricultural products to develop more remunerative market niches for Canadian products. Tariffs would protect the domestic market for Canadian manufacturers; treaties would open the way to international markets in the areas where Canada produced more than it could consume. Increased domestic consumption was not an end in itself, but followed from producer well-being. Making industry profitable would increase employment, providing the wages for workers to spend. When discussing the use of public works, Bennett similarly described "priming the pump" as essentially a pro-business, status quo strategy aimed at returning business to profitability rather than re-orienting the economy towards domestic consumption. When jobs appeared, workers would be able to buy what they needed. Increases in consumption were desirable, but production was the key to consumption.

The same goal was apparent in his discussion of the redistribution of wealth: "It has been increasingly clear to thoughtful minds in all industrial countries," Bennett explained, "that what is needed for the restoration of industrial equilibrium is practically

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

a change in our social system."<sup>89</sup> Reducing the gap between rich and poor was primarily regarded as having social rather than economic benefits, in that it would reduce discontent and civil unrest.

In his third address, Bennett sought to elaborate on the nature of change, explaining that increases in consumption had driven increases in the speed and volume of production. In the early days of capitalism, demand had called for supply, but as the industrial machine became "more efficient, more powerful, more complex, and more concentrated,"<sup>90</sup> the open market had disappeared. Bennett did not embrace consumption as the driving force of the economy; the profit system remained "the keystone of the capitalist arch." Instead he suggested that other parts of the economic structure had given way, including the system of checks and balances that had once regulated relations "both among producers and between producer and consumer."<sup>91</sup> Bennett agreed that "the fundamental economic truth underlying all this change" had not been wholly disclosed.<sup>92</sup> While he continued to maintain that the profit motive was not the cause of collapse but the key to recovery, it was also evident that the needs of the consumer were gaining recognition.<sup>93</sup>

In his final address, Bennett reaffirmed the difference between the economy of the

<sup>89</sup> Cited in O'ram, *The Government Generation*, p. 208.

<sup>90</sup> *The Premier Speaks to the People, The Prime Minister's January Radio Broadcasts issued in book form, The Third Address*, (Ottawa: Dominion Conservative Headquarters, 1935), p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>93</sup> Many of these themes were discussed during the development of the New Deal in the United States during these years. The claim that production and consumption were out of balance, for example, was widely accepted as an explanation of the depression. See Donohue, pp. 199-201 for a parallel discussion of American approaches during the New Deal.

past and the needs of the future, labeling the Liberals as a reactionary party of laissez-faire and identifying the Tories with progressivism in the form of increased intervention in the economy and society.<sup>94</sup> While many doubted Bennett's sincerity, and some members of the Conservative establishment actively opposed the new program, reaction from the Tory press and parliamentarians was, on the whole, favorable. Whether their support was rooted in ideology or in the presumed electoral appeal of Bennett's "New Deal" remains an open question.<sup>95</sup> However, Bennett had, temporarily at least, regained the initiative.

The speech from the throne reiterated these themes, albeit in a more moderate tone. In the debate that followed, the CCF argued that Bennett's proposals were insufficient, while the Liberals argued that Bennett had stolen their ideas. In the end, though, standing in the way of reform was politically unpalatable: the throne speech received unanimous approval. In the winter of 1935 all parties were committed to the principle of reform.<sup>96</sup>

#### **Articulating the Consumer Interest: The Commission Reports**

In the spring of 1935 the Royal Commission on Price Spreads and Mass Buying returned to the front pages of the national press with the publication of its final Report. While Stevens was the moving force behind the inquiry, the Report consolidating the commissions' findings and recommendations was the work of the civil service. The inquiry had often taken the form of a crusade directed against sweatshop conditions and

<sup>94</sup> Donald Forster and Colin Read, "The Politics of Opportunism: The New Deal Broadcasts," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. LX, 3, 1979, p. 334.

<sup>95</sup> See Forster and Read, and J. R. Wilbur, *The Bennett New Deal: Fraud or Portent* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1968).

<sup>96</sup> *Canadian Annual Review, 1935-1936*, p. 18.

the plight of producers. As one of the economists involved later noted, the fall in prices in the domestic market had been treated solely as the result of unfair competition. One "can read the whole of the evidence of the Select Committee. . . [and with few exceptions, find no reference] to the existence of a depression or the reduction of Canadian incomes consequent of the fall in the world prices of her exports."<sup>97</sup>

The Report strove for a more dispassionate tone, presenting recommendations in the context of larger economic changes.<sup>98</sup> While the inquiry had searched for scapegoats, the report sought to advance the understanding of the Canadian economy. Under conditions of monopoly and quasi-monopoly, unregulated competition no longer guaranteed efficiency and maximum production at fair prices. Abuses this extreme, it concluded, could not be corrected by "automatic forces." The only institution that possessed the power to redress these imbalances and inequities was the federal government. The Report called upon the government to intervene on behalf of the small producer, the exploited laborer and the consumer. A Federal Trade and Industry Commission should be created to offset the trend to concentration and correct the abuses that had been uncovered by supervising and regulating a wide range of industrial and commercial activities. The Commission would enforce regulations to standardize, control and grade the output of industry. Consumers would be protected against all forms of profiteering, whether by the sale of inferior merchandize, exorbitant prices or stock manipulation.

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<sup>97</sup> Vincent Bladen, *Bladen on Bladen: Memoirs of a Political Economist* (Toronto: 1978), pp. 61-62.

<sup>98</sup> Credit for imposing a coherent structure on the extensive testimony, for producing recommendations in spite of party differences was frequently given to future Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, the commission's secretary, and to his staff, which included economists V. W. Bladen and C. A. Curtis.



The format of the Report, which included a chapter specifically titled "The Consumer," made it clear that consumers had emerged as an identifiable entity which, like labour and industry, had a particular and legitimate set of interests. Modern production, it was explained, had helped the consumer by reducing the costs and increasing the availability of goods. However, additional steps of distribution now intervened, building a barrier between producers and consumers. In this new world of industry and trade, transactions were no longer direct and face to face; "*caveat emptor*" had taken on "a new and pertinent meaning."<sup>99</sup> The consumer was the frequent victim of false and misleading claims, adulterated goods, inferior substitutes, short weighted scales, deceptive packaging and a host of other practices used by manufacturers and merchants to deceive and defraud customers. Government would intervene to counterbalance exploitation by manufactures and advertisers. While conservative economists had associated working class consumption with irrational choices and the strength of the economy with production, the Price Spreads Report argued that the well-being of the consumer was important if the economy was to prosper. Indeed the Commission observed that it

is now a commonplace of economic thought that the significance of the wage-earner is not confined to his activities as a producer. Production cannot continue without profitable markets; business activity of every sort ceases without prosperous buyers. Despite the importance of certain export markets, our own workers constitute the biggest market for Canadian products. On the stability of their income and purchasing power depend the profits of business enterprise. On their standards of living rests the possibility of commercial prosperity.<sup>100</sup>

The smooth functioning of the economy was becoming linked to the well-being of the

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>100</sup> *Royal Commission on Price Spreads*, p. 106.

consumer rather than the producer. Seeing Canadians as victimized consumers justified the government's increasing involvement in the economy, particularly in areas traditionally regarded as the responsibility of private individuals. Defending the consumer interest was a matter of public good. Economic wrong-doing had shifted from individual consumers to the corporate system.

In calling for the creation of a government agency to explicitly protect consumer rights, the Report began to incorporate consumer concerns into the workings of government and institutionalize a consumer orientation into the economy. The Report did not generally call for government to directly encourage consumption, but rather envisioned that consumption would increase if consumers were informed and protected from fraudulent practices. The strategy was not so much directly to increase working class consumption as to increase it indirectly, by protecting consumer interests. In this way the committee began to advance a larger vision of the role of consumption in the workings of the economy.

In spite of broad unanimity among the commission members, three Liberal representatives signed the report subject to a memorandum of reservations and one member, also a Liberal, dissented altogether and submitted a minority report.<sup>101</sup> All four contended that the official report did not sufficiently emphasize the importance of external trade as a constraining factor on the Canadian economy and expressed preference for increased competition over regulated monopoly. They also insisted that the recommendations failed to adequately consider the interests of the consumer. There was, they acknowledged, a tendency to think of Canada as a nation of producers. However, it

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<sup>101</sup> King had placed some pressure on the Liberal members to support the findings, so that the party would not be seen as obstructing reform. Neatby, p. 102-103.

was the consumer, they proposed, who constituted "the main general interest, as distinguished from particular interests."<sup>102</sup> Arguing that the consumer interest coincided with the public good, the committee favoured measures that would lower prices over those which raised prices even though they recognized that higher prices would help commodity producers.

The sole dissenter, Manitoba Liberal E.J. Young, made an even stronger case for the consumer interest, condemning monopoly and crediting the consumer "exercising his right not to buy" with forcing the readjustment between supply and demand that industry had prevented. It was the consumer, "unorganized and voiceless, the victim of special interests who conspired on every hand to extract more from him" who stood against the organized corporation. Instead of competing to serve, business was holding the consumer hostage. Young believed that the consumer interest would best be served by the open market rather than legislation. The test of the efficiency of any merchandising system must be, he insisted, "'How does it serve the consumer,' and in this test the consumer, himself, will be the judge."<sup>103</sup> Discussing his experiences as a member of the Price Spreads Investigation, Young later explained that "Witness after witness, not from any one class of society, but from every class" came before the Commission asking for their competitors to be restrained in order that they be able to continue in their old occupations in their own way.<sup>104</sup> Young argued that any form of regulation, whether by government or by industrial groups, served only to protect the obsolete. It was up to the people to judge whether they want a particular service or not. The consuming public, through its

<sup>102</sup> *Royal Commission on Price Spreads*, pp. 277-278.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>104</sup> E. J. Young, "A Western Farmer Looks at Business," *Addresses of the Canadian Club of Toronto, 1935-1936* (Toronto: Warwick Bros And Rutter, 1936), February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1936.

choices, eliminated those who were not contributing to the direction of progress while ensuring that those who served the public interest prospered.

The joint memorandum of reservations signed by the three Liberals had noted that while it was customary "to think of the various subdivisions of society entirely in the capacity of producers," it was also possible to think of consumers as a coherent group, ~~alike~~ in a way that producers were not. Again Young's Minority Report went a step further, making the case that people were equal in their role as consumers regardless of their role as producers. Efforts to legislate improvements in working conditions and wages on the grounds that "we are all producers" were fundamentally misguided.

It is true we are all producers—but we are not all producers of the particular article or articles about which we are legislating and therefore we cannot all benefit from such legislation. The only common ground on which we all stand is as consumers. The only legislation that can be just to all is legislation in the interests of the consumer. The man or the system that best serves the human race is the one that serves the interest of the consumer. . . The only interest that is not a class interest is the consumer interest. The only legislation that is not class legislation is legislation in the interests of the consumer. In seeking the remedy for our economic ills, we should always keep the consumer's interest uppermost in our minds for 'the consumer's interest is the interest of the human race.'<sup>105</sup>

The depression, the Stevens' inquiry, and now the Report of the Royal Commission Report set the tone for the coming election, compelling politicians and commentators of various beliefs to re-examine the relationship between producers, consumers and capitalism.

### **The Reconstruction Party**

It was probably inevitable that Stevens would find the government's recommendations for implementing the Report on Price Spreads unequal to the crusade

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 293, 307.



he had waged. By July Stevens made the final break, announcing the formation of the Reconstruction Party, so named because it would help to "reconstruct Canada's shattered national policy, to wage war with poverty, and to abolish involuntary idleness."<sup>106</sup> Condemning big business and bankers with "evangelical fervor,"<sup>107</sup> Stevens offered himself as an advocate for the "the average citizen" and "the forgotten groups of society."<sup>108</sup> Although the election date had not yet been set, the Reconstruction Party issued a fifteen point platform pledging "to open up avenues of opportunity for all who are willing to work ... [and] to provide such work for those who find it impossible to secure any other employment as to enable them to retain their self-respect and earn a moderate living."<sup>109</sup> Stevens claimed that the Reconstruction Party was not interested in the overthrow of capitalism. His mission was not to reform the nation but to restore it by having government "hold the balance in equity" between the great mass of the people and the powerful corporations and banks which controlled credit, industry and commerce. Greed, rather than economic change, was seen as the source of Canada's problems. The "very roots" of democracy were being "torn away by the ruthless activities of the powerful few who by their wealth control Government."<sup>110</sup>

Pledging legislation to fully implement the Price Spreads Report, Stevens emphasized the plight of the small producer. The concentration of control in the hands of powerful financiers and industrialists was undermining the democratic and egalitarian principles that were the foundation of the nation. Changes in distribution represented the

<sup>106</sup> Beck, pp. 210-211.

<sup>107</sup> Innis, p. 281.

<sup>108</sup> Glassford, p. 138.

<sup>109</sup> Reconstruction Platform of 1935, *Ottawa Journal*, July 12, 1935, cited in D. O. Carrigan, *Canadian Party Platforms, 1867 - 1968* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1968), p. 130.

<sup>110</sup> H. H. Stevens, "The Issues as I See Them," p. 32.

shift in power away from independents and individuals to mass manufactures, conglomerates and mass consumers. As a Stevens' supporter had previously explained, it gave "the few too great a domination over our economic structure, with power to determine the kind of lives we shall live." Without change, "more and more people will become little better than slaves."<sup>111</sup> The promise of intervention was linked to the restoration of traditional communities rooted in individual self-reliance, property and production.

Presenting the party to *Maclean's Magazine*, Stevens described Canada as "a country of homes" and the family as "the unit and basis of society."<sup>112</sup> Although the appeal of the Party was rooted in time-honored of private ownership, hard work and self-reliance, the platform acknowledged "that it is absolutely essential to the welfare and happiness of Canadians that there should be a wider enjoyment of those things that make for a happy Canadian livelihood."<sup>113</sup> The inability of farmers and industrial workers to buy goods was discussed as evidence that the system was unhealthy.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the family unit was modified in Stevens' account to include a head consumer as well as a head producer. "It is recognized," he explained, "that the responsibility of making the consumer's dollar go as far as possible rests largely with the women. It will be, therefore, the policy of this party to ensure that in every way possible exploitation of the public through unwarranted profits shall be vigorously restricted."<sup>115</sup>

Canadian business historian David Monod proposes that Steven's appeal arose

<sup>111</sup> *Canadian Forum*, August 1934, p. 430.

<sup>112</sup> H. H. Stevens, "The Issues as I See Them," *Maclean's Magazine*, September 15, 1935, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>114</sup> *The Globe*, Saturday July 13, 1935, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> "Reconstruction Platform of 1935," in Carrigan, p. 133.

from the apprehension and uncertainty of the depression period rather than a genuine desire to return to the past.<sup>116</sup> The Reconstruction Party presented itself as the advocate of the traditional middle class of small manufacturers, retailers, farmers, commercial travelers, labourers and unorganized professionals as they confronted the organized and the powerful. Providing Canadians with jobs and opportunities, the prospect of "adventure," and "things to do"<sup>117</sup> would reinvigorate the way of life and the set of values that had once been seen as instrumental to the development of the nation. Restricting big business would allow the small independents to flourish once more. The call to restore the past was also a protest against the limitations of modern life.

While campaigning, Stevens observed that the boundary between politics and economics had dissolved.<sup>118</sup> It was "now as much the duty of the State to ensure for its people the elementary needs of food, clothing and shelter on a civilized scale as to protect them and their property from molestation."<sup>119</sup> Because the household was a unit that functioned as the centre of both production and consumption, support for the consumer was the natural counterpart to support for the independent producer. Although the Reconstruction Party seldom focused specifically on consumption, it helped to carry forward the idea of the family unit, including both a producer and a consumer, as the nucleus of the social order, and a preference for individual rather than mass consumption.

### **The Conservative Campaign**

When Bennett fell ill in the spring of 1935, the energy generated by the New Deal Broadcasts began to dissipate. When the Prime Minister spoke to the nation again at the

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<sup>116</sup> Monod, p. 343.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

beginning of September, it was to announce that the election would be held on Monday October 14<sup>th</sup>. During the campaign little mention was made of new measures of social reform. Bennett pointed instead to the government's efforts to improve living standards by improving the economy, first by tariff increases and then by trade treaties. He pointed to increasing exports and the government's efforts to maintain the financial integrity of the country and "the good name of Canada before the world" as evidence of success.<sup>120</sup> He pledged new funds for job training and spoke of the government's intentions to introduce Old Age Pensions. Retiring workers over sixty years of age, he added, would provide openings for younger people and lessen problems of unemployment. Economic equality "in the reasonable meaning of the word" would be spread through conservative policies of "saneness and fair play." "We will get nowhere by recklessly and stupidly clouting capitalism into a paralysis of ineffectiveness," he cautioned Canadians. "Treat capitalism decently, not for its own sake but for your own sake. For it can serve you well."<sup>121</sup>

While pledging to introduce protective legislation recommended by the Royal Commission on Price Spreads, Bennett continued to ignore consumption as a significant force in the economy. In his eyes, Canada remained an exporting nation. At a final pre-election rally in Maple Leaf Gardens, Bennett called for rigid economy, a balanced budget and the vigorous prosecution of communist agitators. Declaring that "the basis of all our civilization must be the maintenance of what we have come to consider law and

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<sup>120</sup> R. B. Bennett, "The Issues as I See Them," *Maclean's Magazine*, September 15, 1935, p. 10.

<sup>121</sup> Co-operative Commonwealth Federation Platform of 1935, *Calgary United Farmer*, July 19, 1935 cited in D. O. Carrigan, *Canadian Party Platforms, 1867 - 1968* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1968), p.119.



order," he called for a return to producerist values of thrift, hard work and determination. The depression was denounced as the result of speculation. Property was acclaimed as the source of real wealth. The nation's economic future continued to depend upon the application of labour and capital to natural resources.

### The Liberal Campaign

Of all the parties involved in the election, the Liberals seemed least concerned about the fate of capitalism as an economic institution.<sup>122</sup> King frequently made the case that financial mismanagement rather than fundamental flaws were responsible for the current crisis. The party continued to promote ameliorative rather than redistributive approaches, advocating small reforms to moderate the excesses of monopoly capitalism while emphasizing increased trade as the key to prosperity. Campaign literature drew from the address King had made to the House in February of 1933, frequently concluding with the non-specific, vaguely consumerist pledge King had made at that time:

The Liberal party recognizes that the problem of distribution has become more important than that of production, and believes that personality is more sacred than property. It will devote itself to find ways and means of effecting a fair and just distribution of wealth with increasing regard to *human needs*, to the furtherance of *social justice*, and to the promotion of the *common good*.<sup>123</sup>

King's discussion of consumption remained rooted in moral and social rather than economic justifications. Other Liberals were more open to the need for state intervention in the economy and more willing to consider the economic potential of mass

<sup>122</sup> J. Murray Beck suggests that this in part explains why King focused his political arguments primarily on individual and parliamentary rights. p. 213

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, W. L. Mackenzie King, "The Issues as I See Them," *Maclean's Magazine*, September 15, 1935, p. 31; and Mackenzie King, "The Liberal Party's Position," National Liberal Federation of Canada, Ottawa, cited in D. O. Carrigan, *Canadian Party Platforms, 1867-1968* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1968), p. 130.

consumption. The Liberal summer school of 1933 was one venue for a more detailed consideration of current issues by younger party members. The most common theme at the conference, historian Doug Owsram observes, was the call for planning; but running alongside this was an emerging new emphasis on issues relevant to consumption, particularly on the right to a minimum standard of living.<sup>124</sup> Vincent Massey, Chair of the Conference, set the tone for the event, suggesting that the ultimate objective of the civilized state was the "happiness of the individual. If civilization means anything, men and women must have the assurance of security against those material evils from which the State can protect them; and they must enjoy the guarantee of minimum standards of life."<sup>125</sup> This, Massey insisted, was "no side issue; it is a major objective." Freedom no longer "meant freedom from government interference, it now must mean freedom by government interference."<sup>126</sup> Francis Hankin, co-author of *Recovery by Control*, similarly argued that an ideal economic society must seek to maintain the social welfare of its people, and "to enlarge the decencies and restrict the hazards of life." He too saw increased government as the mechanism to make this happen.<sup>127</sup> Increasing government expenditures for the purposes of social welfare were justified by another speaker, economist K. W. Taylor, "so long as the public use of that money results in greater social gain than the private use to which it would have been put."<sup>128</sup> The following summer, Norman Rogers, formerly secretary to King and now an Associate Professor of Political

<sup>124</sup> Owsram, *The Government Generation*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>125</sup> Vincent Massey, "The Approach to the Problem," *The Liberal Way, A Record of Opinion on Canadian Problems as Expressed and Discussed at the First Liberal Summer Conference, Port Hope, September, 1933* (Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1933), p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Science at Queen's, wrote a lengthy article for *Canadian Forum* linking the demand for constitutional revision with the emergence of "a new social philosophy" originating in dissatisfaction with the social instability inherent in the modern organization of industry and commerce. This philosophy, he proposed, aims at a larger measure of security for wage-earners to be obtained by the intervention of the State in the economic life of the community.<sup>129</sup> In all of these arguments increased consumption was discussed, not as a matter of people making independent choices in the marketplace, but as the result of increased management by the state.

Recognizing the trend away from laissez-faire liberalism and toward intervention, but seeing only limited consensus between young and old Liberals, King steered the party cautiously. In spite of the desire for reform, he was loathe to reopen any discussion that might lead to dissension within the party. Instead efforts were undertaken to publicize King's record as a reformer and the party's historical commitment to progressive social action.<sup>130</sup>

King was particularly involved in the preparation of his campaign biography, the concluding chapter of which sought to present Canadian Liberalism responding to the challenges of the age.<sup>131</sup> In this new era, it was explained, Liberalism would fight to give

<sup>129</sup> Norman Rogers, "The Dead Hand," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 167, August 1934, p. 421.

<sup>130</sup> In addition to party literature, billboards and radio broadcasts, these included the preparation of a series of articles (later collected and reprinted in pamphlet form) that re-examined King's *Industry and Humanity*, drawing favorable comparisons with FDR's National Recovery Administration; a new abridged version of *Industry and Humanity*; and a campaign biography of King prepared by Norman Rogers. See Reginald Whitaker, *The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930-58* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, pp. 81-83; and Neatby, pp. 97-98.

<sup>131</sup> Norman Rogers, *Mackenzie King*, (Toronto: T. Nelson & Sons, Ltd. 1935), p. 190.

"freedom a larger social content."<sup>132</sup> Economic insecurity, especially fear of poverty and unemployment, were described as the "negation of freedom" and "subversive of human personality."<sup>133</sup> Liberalism had "declared war against them." The party pledged to eliminate fear by offering Canadians a middle course that would balance "the pull of tradition and the urge of innovation . . . so to organize our social and economic life as to make possible a more abundant life for all members of the community."<sup>134</sup> The ability to participate in the economy of spending and accumulation was now associated with participation and membership in democratic society. Henceforth, political democracy would include the right to a minimum standard of living.

These questions, however, were associated in the first instance with the right to employment and only then, in the absence of jobs, with government measures. The reason, King explained, lay in the pages of *Industry and Humanity*, reissued for the election in an abridged version:

Whatever increases production tends to enhance purchasing power, and so to benefit the parties to Industry. Whatever enhances purchasing power tends, in turn, to increase production. Instead, therefore, of a vicious circle, bred of fears and narrowing continually towards destruction and extermination, the substitution of Faith for Fear provides an enchanted circle widening ever towards increase of effort and increase of enjoyment as well.<sup>135</sup>

Industrialists and consumers shared a mutual interest in abundant consumption. A strong economy offered the greatest possibility for individual improvement; what was good for business was good for the consumer and vice versa.

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190-192.

<sup>135</sup> Cited in Bernard Rose, *Industry and Humanity: an Outstanding contribution to the Understanding of Industrial Relations and the Need for Economic Justice, Analysis and Re-Valuation* (Montreal: The Labour World, 1934), p.18.



### The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation

From the time of its founding, CCF policy statements distinguished between production (which was to be socialized and centrally planned), distribution (which was to be equalized), and consumption (which could remain private). The Regina Manifesto, written in the summer of 1933 to present Canadians with a unified statement of party policy, sought to link these ideals by stating that socialization and the collective organization of the nation's economic resources would make possible a "greater degree of leisure and a much richer individual life for every citizen."<sup>136</sup> In articles and addresses leading up to election, CCF politicians consistently explained the depression as the consequence of underconsumption. The CCF, they insisted, would manage the various aspects of the economy for the benefit of all, eliminating peaks and valleys in both the social structure and the business cycle. Every effort was made to reassure voters that CCF policies of socialization did not extend to personal property. The CCF, it was explained, stood for an "orderly" and "speedy" transition from competitive capitalism, "where the basic principle is 'Everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost,' to a system based on co-operation, where the need of each will be the concern of all." The CCF "alone gives promise of plenty and prosperity, peace and happiness, and a material and cultured standard of living for everybody higher than we have yet even dared to dream of," promised long time Labour M. P. and CCF organizer Angus MacInnis.<sup>137</sup> However many Canadians, including several of the original party founders, remained disturbed by the explicit socialism of the Manifesto and the perceived threat to private property.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Regina Manifesto, in Young, p. 305.

<sup>137</sup> Angus MacInnis, *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 158, November 1933, p. 57.

<sup>138</sup> Young, pp. 47-48. Agnes Macphail, for example, had been instrumental in having the

Inconsistencies in the party's message were exacerbated by the release of *Social Planning for Canada* by the League for Social Reconstruction, a group of academics closely associated with the CCF, one month prior to the election.<sup>139</sup> The LSR described itself as an organization working for the establishment of a social order in which the basic principle regulating production, distribution and service would be the common good rather than private profit. "Planlessness, rigidities and above all the restriction of markets enforced by pursuit of profit produces a situation in which consumption chronically lags behind capacity to produce."<sup>140</sup> Canadians were told that fundamental changes were required in the economy and the social structures of Canada. An extensive program of public ownership and planning was proposed to "secure to the worker an adequate income and leisure." True freedom, the LSR insisted, consisting of opportunities for "unfettered personal development," which could only be enjoyed "by people whose work and incomes are secure. . .and offered them a reasonable chance of a decent living and leisure."<sup>141</sup>

While the authors of *Social Planning for Canada* insisted that everyone should enjoy the material benefits of the modern age, they strongly condemned the materialism of modern society. The privileged were described as only interested in "things" and "vulgar display of houses and lands;" meanwhile, the working classes "rendered unfit by fatigue" were "ill-equipped to make use of what leisure time they possess." Barren of

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United Farmers of Ontario affiliate with the CCF in 1932, but the radical nature of the Regina Manifesto cause the organization to have second thoughts. In March 1934 it withdrew its affiliation, later giving support to the Reconstruction party. Beck, p. 216.

<sup>139</sup> League for Social Reconstruction, Research Committee, *Social Planning for Canada* (Toronto: T. Nelson, 1935).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

inner resources, ordinary Canadians increasingly occupied themselves "in the vicarious excitement of commercialized sports and amusements."<sup>142</sup> While declaring that the "ultimate end of all productive activity is the satisfaction of the wants of consumers,"<sup>143</sup> the authors left readers with the clear sense that some forms of consumption were regarded as better than others.

By shifting the economy away from the making of profits and toward the making of goods and services, the CCF promised a consumption oriented economy with production geared to people's needs and increased economic stability. For this reason the party also proposed to turn away from the global economy. As Woodsworth explained, Canada's efforts to compete in the world markets meant lowering "living standards to those of the peasant, the fellah, the peon, and the coolie."<sup>144</sup> Instead, the CCF proposed that it would be possible to operate the Canadian economy as a self-contained unit with a sustainable balance in producing and consumer power. The CCF remained committed to the system of mass production, advanced mechanization, large-scale industrialization and expert management that had emerged under capitalism. Indeed insofar as production would be managed with greater efficiency and according to need rather than profit, Canadians might expect to see modest increases in the availability of some goods and services. It was, however, principles of social justice rather than the prospect of abundance that guided the CCF's policy. Insofar as planning would maximize efficiency and minimize the destructive cycle of booms and busts, the expansion of government was linked to new understandings of the relationship between domestic production and

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 425.

<sup>144</sup> Woodsworth, "The Issues as I see Them," p. 11.

domestic consumption. Turning inwards would allow for better control of Canada's destiny. Growth would be sacrificed for stability.

The CCF expressed little interest in countercyclical government spending, which would, from their perspective, do little to fix what was wrong with the system. Priming the pump would only put more money into the hands of consumers so that they could continue to support business as usual. A planned economy rather than a consumer-driven economy was regarded as the most effective way to usher in an economy of sufficiency for all.<sup>145</sup>

Heading into the election, Woodsworth reaffirmed the party's commitment to the Regina program of 1933, emphasizing that "in this age of potential plenty" socialization of the means of production would offer economic security for everyone at a reasonably high standard. He repeated earlier promises that the CCF had no objection to private property. The party, he insisted, supported the efforts of ordinary Canadians to obtain "those things which we can personally use and enjoy. It hopes that people will have more of these things."<sup>146</sup> The sense remained, however, that the CCF was more interested in equalizing than in maximizing individual consumption. Unfortunately for the party, stability was a compelling message during the depression, but less so during the recovery.

### **The Arrival of Social Credit**

After winning a sweeping victory in the Alberta provincial election on August 22,

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<sup>145</sup> For parallel American commitments to planning see Donohue, p. 224. Many American economists and politicians, for example, understood the role of pensions, unemployment insurances and job creation efforts, not as a matter of social justice, but as a way to sustain the buying power of consumers, believing that income redistribution would maximize prosperity by turning the wheels of the economy. Donohue, pp. 218-219.

<sup>146</sup> J. S. Woodsworth, "The Issues as I See Them," *Maclean's Magazine*, September 15, 1935, p. 32.



the Social Credit Party decided to enter federal politics. Social credit ideas were not new in Canada. The theories of its founder had been known and discussed by Canada's reform leaders since the twenties.<sup>147</sup> William Aberhart, a school principal and fundamentalist radio evangelist and now the new Premier of Alberta, offered a simplified version. Social Credit, he proposed, could be boiled down to three little things: establish a just price for all goods sold in the market; keep credit flowing by eliminating debt; and issue a regular monthly dividend to every citizen.<sup>148</sup>

Orthodox social credit theory maintained that a permanent deficiency of purchasing power was inherent in the capitalist financial system in the Machine Age. If the economic system was to function, the state needed to reassert its power to set and control monetary policy and directly increase the purchasing power of consumers.<sup>149</sup> Surplus goods were a symptom rather than the cause of distress. The operational problem was a lack of purchasing power in the hands of the consumer intensified by profiteering (which, Aberhart, noted had been identified in the Price Spreads Report), over-investment and high interest rates.<sup>150</sup> Issuing credit would immediately distribute the goods and services that had been stored up, increasing the turnover of the retailer and wholesaler, and putting factories and producers back to work. The one great feature of the whole remedy, Aberhart asserted, was that men, women and children would be given

<sup>147</sup> See Brecher, pp. 87-88, 90-92, 104.

<sup>148</sup> William Aberhart, "Social Credit," *Proceedings of the Canadian Club*, Toronto, September 13, 1935, reprinted in D. R. Elliott, *Aberhart: Outpourings and Replies* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1991), pp. 152-153.

<sup>149</sup> C.B. Macpherson, "The Political Theory of Social Credit" *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Volume 15, No. 3, August 1949, pp. 378-379.

<sup>150</sup> William Aberhart, *Social Credit Manual*, reprinted in Elliott, p. 130; John Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 357.

sufficient purchasing power to guarantee their food, clothing and shelter.<sup>151</sup> Public welfare would be measured in the consumption of goods rather than in business profits.

As Aberhart described it, the dividend or "social credit" was both a social program, in that it was intended to ameliorate the poverty of the depression, and an economic measure intended to stimulate job creation. The Social Credit Manual stated that "it is the duty of the State through its Government to organize its economic structure in such a way that no bona fide citizen, man, woman or child, shall be allowed to suffer for lack of bare necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, in the midst of plenty or abundance."<sup>152</sup> Dividends would be paid to every citizen, regardless of whether they were employed or not, regardless of their wealth. Every citizen had the right, by virtue of citizenship, to share in the common cultural heritage and resource wealth of the province or nation. Dividends would never have to be paid back, but they would have to be spent. With the economy driven by consumer spending, the productive capacity of the industrial system would be utilized and developed to the fullest. Sustaining the buying power of consumers would be good for the economy. Freed from the tyranny of concentrated power, material well-being would flow to all.

The election of the Social Credit party in Alberta has been described as "the most sensational Canadian political event of the 1930's."<sup>153</sup> Thompson and Seager claim that only the birth of the Dionne quintuplets brought Canada more international attention. Aberhart facilitated the transfer to this energy to the federal arena, supporting candidates in the federal election by addresses and radio broadcasts from Alberta and in interviews

<sup>151</sup> William Aberhart, "An Exposition of Social Credit" cited in L. H. Thomas (ed.) *William Aberhart and Social Credit in Alberta* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1977), p. 68.

<sup>152</sup> William Aberhart, *Social Credit Manual*, in Elliott, p. 129.

<sup>153</sup> Thompson and Seager, p. 235.

and speeches delivered as he traveled from Edmonton to Ottawa that September to appeal to the Prime Minister for funding. Full slates of Social Credit candidates were fielded in Alberta and Saskatchewan; a scattering of candidates were also running in British Columbia and Manitoba. Social Credit might not have the same appeal in a federal election that it had demonstrated in Alberta, but no one was certain what would happen. Aberhart was unique, but every province had been affected by the depression.<sup>154</sup>

It was the Social Credit party which presented the clearest vision of a nation of citizen consumers in which everyone was not only entitled to, but indeed had a responsibility to consume the products of industry and agriculture. Insofar as government credits and wages would expire at the end of each year, they existed only to be spent. Or, as Adam Shortt had put it: their meaning lay in their spending.

The arrival of a party on the federal scene that regarded aggregate consumer spending as the key to economic recovery focused attention on the power and importance of mass, rather than individual, consumption. And yet, while the Price Spreads Report had revealed that Canadians were in fact the largest consumers of Canadian products, only the CCF and the Social Credit parties really saw the potential for a national economy driven by the purchasing power of Canadian consumers. Both of the major political parties insisted that national prosperity depended upon international trade. Social Credit was ridiculed by mainstream politicians and economists, but it brought to the fore something other parties had circled around but not fully grappled with: the power of aggregate consumption and the possibility of building a national economy on spending and consumption rather than on saving and investment.

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<sup>154</sup> Neatby, p. 114.

### The Election Results

When nominations closed on October 7<sup>th</sup>, Canadian voters faced the largest number of candidates ever, representing a wide spectrum of political programs. Interest in the election was high; record crowds had turned out to hear the leaders and seventy-five percent of the eligible voters went to the polls. The results largely reaffirmed Canada's commitment to a free market economy.<sup>155</sup> The Liberals were elected with an overwhelming majority. Parties advocating extreme roles for state, whether on the left or the right, failed to win power. However, as commentators have noted then and since, the size of both the Liberal victory and the Conservative loss were exaggerated by the structure of Canada's electoral system. While Liberals won control of the House, the popular vote was less decisive. Over half of the voters preferred other parties. One-in-five voted for parties that were not even in existence at the time of the last election in 1930.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover the campaign had not been fought or won solely on the issues.<sup>157</sup> Party organization was vital to the outcome. Contingency was also a significant factor. Bennett had the bad luck to hold office for the worst of the depression years. The timing of the Social Credit victory in Alberta gave the party visibility, credibility and momentum that it

<sup>155</sup> The election results were as follows: Liberals (173 seats; 44.8% popular vote); Conservatives (40 seats; 29.6% popular vote); CCF (7 seats; 8.8% popular vote); Reconstructionist (1 seat; 8.7% popular vote); Social Credit (17 seats; 4.1% popular vote); Other (7 seats; 3.9% popular vote). In at least forty-five constituencies, the combined Conservative and Reconstructionist vote would have won the seat. Thirty-six of these constituencies had been Conservative in the last Parliament. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival: the Conservative Party of Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>156</sup> Neatby, p. 123.

<sup>157</sup> Election analyses are available in Beck, pp. 206-222; Escott Reid, "The Canadian Election of 1935—and After," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, February 1936, and Thompson and Seager, 274-276.



would not otherwise have had. Rising tensions in Europe raised the specter of war and conscription, particularly influencing Quebec voters. The gradual improvement in the economy may have moderated the appeal of radical alternatives, although it did not seem to help Bennett.

In the preceding year many of Canada's political leaders declared that capitalism had entered a new phase. Bennett announced "the old order is gone." Liberals noted that "It is a commonplace to say that we are now passing through a period of transition . . . part of a process of major re-adjustment which will leave the world a different place to live in from what it has been before."<sup>158</sup> "We face the end of an era," Woodsworth proclaimed. Capitalism "had come to a halt" and the nation stood on the threshold of a new age in which the machinery of production and distribution would be operated to serve the needs of the people, "consonant with the spirit of brotherhood."<sup>159</sup> Whether Canada had entered a new age, a period of transition, or was poised on the threshold of change, these phrases suggest awareness that a political and economic turning point had been reached.

Before the depression the role of government in the economy was primarily to support and facilitate private enterprise or to build infrastructure deemed essential to Canada. This involved intervention in the form of tariffs, loans, and infrastructure development, but a largely laissez-faire approach to consumption and wages. The principles of sound finance required annual balanced budgets that, in any case, left little room for intervention. It was assumed that the natural equilibrium of the business cycle would automatically keep supply and demand in rough balance. With an economy in

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<sup>158</sup> Rogers, p. 190.

<sup>159</sup> Woodsworth, "The Issues as I See Them," pp. 31-32.

crisis, the government was increasingly called upon to assume a role in managing the supply of goods and co-coordinating distributive processes. After the depression, the role of government continued to expand and the cycle of expenditure became tied to the economic and political cycle rather than the calendar or budget year.

While few economists endorsed the power of the consumer to revitalize the economy, all politicians assigned a new importance to the role of consumer. During the campaign, every party announced support for legislation designed to protect the consumer from exploitation. Introducing regulations to protect consumers, all parties recognized that consumer rights and the right to consume was becoming central to the political discourse, if not to economic policy. Reframing capitalism as production in the service of human needs, expanding the discussion to include the consumer concerns, provided a vehicle and an opportunity to reach beyond traditional constituencies and address wider audiences. In this context, protecting the consumer from exploitation was easily identified with helping to promote the common good. Similarly, every party committed itself to ensuring the economic security of individual Canadians and a decent standard of living. The details of what this standard would be were scanty, but assurances that every Canadian would have basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter were now fundamental. Persistent statements that Canadians had the right to a minimal standard of living and that the state had a duty to provide it, helped to forge a link between citizenship and consumption. The consumer in the economic realm was becoming increasingly identified with the citizen in the political realm.<sup>160</sup> Not everyone was a worker, but everyone was a consumer.

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<sup>160</sup> Cohen, *Getting and Spending*, p. 111.

### 8. Society in Tension and Transformation

As the depression eased many members of Canada's cultural and intellectual community began to grapple with the cumulative results of decades of change, documenting new structures of class relations and recording value conflicts between classes, genders and generations. Those engaged in what has been referred to as the "professional seeking to understand society"<sup>1</sup> that is, its writers, artists, intellectuals, and social scientists took upon themselves the task of charting the contours of modern Canada and struggled to determine their place in it. Considered collectively this effort produced the first descriptions of a society in which consumption, commercialization, commodification and abundance were key themes.

The narratives that were produced in this period (1934-1940), revealed a society defined as much by its tensions as by consensus.<sup>2</sup> At issue were more than temporary conflicts of transition, although these were considerable. For most Canadians, hard work and thrift were not merely institutionalized values, but daily practices driven by necessity. The limits of family incomes continued to require prudent choices; however, the proliferation of mass-produced goods and the experiences of the depression (widely seen as the consequence of glut and over-production and therefore associated with frustrated consumption rather than scarcity) challenged the virtue of making-do. While meager funds encouraged thrift, desire was stimulated by advertising and an expanding number of leisure time pursuits, including movies and window-shopping. Increasing consumption opportunities pit wage spenders against wage earners, threatening the cohesion of the family unit. In the arts and professions, the opportunity to earn money in

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<sup>1</sup> Susman, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of a culture defined by its tensions is discussed in Susman, pp. xx, 288.

new ways involved the intellectual community in the problem of commoditization. They struggled with the implications of producing goods for consumption, suspecting that participation in the circulation of commodities undercut their mission as intellectual and cultural elites.

Identifying the forms and parameters of ordinary consumption, including the perpetual tension between limited means and unlimited wants, was the preliminary step to developing a normative understanding of consumer society. As new models of the social order were developed, as new narratives were written and as new accounts of the relationship between economics and society worked out, it was clear that the social and cultural significance of consumption and of relations of consumption had expanded dramatically.

### **The Socio-economic Structure**

"Paramount among the results of industrialization," one of Canada's pre-eminent social scientists noted in 1940, was "that it *creates wage-earners*."<sup>3</sup> By the late thirties less than ten percent of Canada's wage earning population were employed in agriculture, fishing or logging. Almost half lived in urban rather than rural settings. This transition had been shaped by both the boom years of the 1920s, when new opportunities drew Canadians into wage earning, and by the slow years of depression and drought which forced others to seek waged employment.<sup>4</sup>

Traditionally working for wages was seen as a distinguishing factor of class. As

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Marsh, *Canadians In and Out of Work*, (McGill Social Research Series, 1940), p. 260. See also comments on pp. 391, 395, 457.

<sup>4</sup> Industrial Relations Section, School of Commerce and Administration, Queen's University, *The Economic Welfare of Canadian Employees: A Study of Occupations, Earnings, Hours and Other Working Conditions, 1913-1937* (Kingston: Queen's University, 1940), pp. 11-18.



day-to-day life increasingly came to involve the buying of goods and services, the issue was no longer how a family obtained its income, but how much income it could obtain. New questions asked in the 1931 census had made it possible to compare for the first time the earnings of occupations that had previously been grouped in different classes.<sup>5</sup> It was discovered, for example, that males between the ages of twenty and forty-four years of age earning an average of between fifteen and twenty dollars per week of employment included unskilled workers, labourers, seaman, sailors and deckhands, waiters, weavers, messengers, cooks, teamsters and carriage drivers, janitors and sextons, boot and shoe operatives, barbers and hairdressers, chauffeurs, bus drivers and truck drivers. Groups reporting average earnings of between twenty and twenty-five dollars included bakers, longshoremen and stevedores, cabinet and furniture makers, butchers, painters, decorators, coal miners, tailors, tinsmiths, clergymen, and priests. Policemen, detectives, brakemen, insurance agents, purchasing and sales agents, and foremen reported average earnings of between thirty and thirty-five dollars.

Grouping occupations from the point of view of earnings highlighted changes in the way Canadians were coming to think about society. The commodification of luxuries as well as necessities made the quantity and stability of income and borrowing ability increasingly critical to well-being and served to erode many of the distinctions that had formerly separated social groups. In a production-centered society, ownership of the means of production gave power. As ownership gave way to management and society

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55. The traditional measure of economic welfare—higher wages—was regarded as simplistic, the study noted, because statistics such as the average annual earnings per employed worker that grouped together the earnings of men, women, unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers, failing to convey the impact of declines in hours of work per week, of periods of unemployment, or even of the welfare of groups which contained both employed and unemployed members. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

became increasingly consumption oriented, the ability to consume became the more critical factor in establishing social status.

Looking back relative to the conditions of their youth or to the experiences of their parents, many working class families in the late 1930s found that their hours of labour had decreased and that their purchasing power had increased.<sup>6</sup> Comparisons with the past, however interesting for statisticians, were understood to hold minimal interest for the nation's average wage-earning family. As J. C. Cameron, the Head of Industrial Relations at Queen's explained, "In the last analysis . . . from the point of view of employees, their present economic position depends not only on its relation to that of the past, but also upon its relation to that of other groups in the community . . . the question of 'status' is one of satisfactions, and satisfactions are relative."<sup>7</sup>

A comprehensive study of Canada's class structure was prepared at this time by Leonard Marsh, Director of Social Research at the McGill University. Measurements of class difference, Marsh noted, were historically lacking in Canada. His first task, therefore, was to manipulate the data provided by the occupational census to new

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<sup>6</sup> *Economic Welfare of Canadians*, pp. 21, 24, 39. In general, it was observed that gains in money wages occurred primarily before 1923-1924 and were the result of higher wages in a period of increased industrial activity, while increases in real earnings paradoxically were achieved during periods of declining prices. This meant that the purchasing power of wage-earning families had generally declined during the boom and increased during the depression. Correlations between changes in wage rates, hours of employment and the cost of living suggested that although the real value of hourly rates was 35 to 45 per cent higher in 1938 than in 1921, the overall annual real earnings per employed worker in Canada had risen by a more modest five percent. It is interesting to compare the Canadian and the American situations. While most of the gains in real weekly wages in America had been accomplished by 1923-1924, in Canada over one half of the total gains in real annual earnings associated with the period 1920 to 1936-1938 occurred after 1926. The explanation offered was the more extensive reduction of working hours in the United States during the same period.

<sup>7</sup> *Economic Welfare of Canadians*, p. iii.

purposes. Engaging in a lengthy process of "social arithmetic," Marsh correlated different elements to reveal a structure of eleven occupational status divisions grouped in four social classes.<sup>8</sup> Marsh described these divisions as shaded rather than abrupt, shaped by patterns of distinction that were "more the accompaniments of wealth than birth."<sup>9</sup>

Canada's class structure, he insisted, was unlike that familiar in the Old World, in which rank reflected one's position at birth in an established social hierarchy. It was also, Marsh believed, unlike Marxist theory which divided society between owners (whether of property or the means of production) and the proletariat. Instead, Canadian social classes were the reflection of occupational incomes and the patterns of consumption that these incomes allowed. Because the amount of money an individual had to spend "directly determined his command over the actual symbols of status," social ranking proceeded "outwards from occupation" to include standards of living, levels of education, and differences of attitude and opinion. Money, he observed, "not only measures status but helps to buy it."<sup>10</sup>

Status in Canada, as Marsh described it, was not abstract but was embodied in the possession and display of symbols, in the reactions to social situations, and in the scope of opportunity and experiences an individual might encounter in life. An individual's or

<sup>8</sup> Marsh, pp. 4-27, 426.

<sup>9</sup> Marsh, pp. 389, 391.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165. Canadian labour historian Bryan Palmer argues that the development of mass consumer culture was an effective brake on the class struggle, undermining the cultural bonds that had united labour and redirecting attention from the work place to the home. Marsh's analysis suggests that the effect was even more corrosive, as the attention to consumption remade the socially significant markers of class difference. Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), p. 190. Palmer's assertion softened somewhat in the second edition (1992), see pp. 229, 232.

family's "social aura" was directly related to the economic facts of their life.<sup>11</sup> If members of a class shared "the same kind of reaction" in social situations, it was because they "live similar kinds of lives."<sup>12</sup> The socially important aspect of occupation was the level of consumption it allowed and the "differences in freedom"<sup>13</sup> experienced.

In describing Canadian society as a pyramid with a ladder running through it,<sup>14</sup> Marsh had chosen an image that combined hierarchy and social mobility. He noted, however, that the ladder was becoming increasingly difficult to climb. The rapid rise from peasant to landholder or shopkeeper that had made North America an apparent "land of opportunity" was becoming less likely. Historically, Marsh claimed, it was the first step into Canadian society which had been transformative; since the war declining immigration and the absence of free land reduced mobility at the point of entry. Once inside Canada, social mobility had often been less dramatic and was becoming increasingly less so as class differences became entrenched.

While Canadians were shifting from farming and small trades to wage-earning, shifts within the manufacturing sector, including increasing mechanization and the utilization of techniques of scientific management, were constricting the need for labour and reallocating the less qualified into positions of casual rather than steady employment. A Queen's University study noted that a gap was emerging between the wage-earning abilities of the least skilled employees in the lowest wage classes who tended to be the least regularly employed, and those of better trained, higher waged and more steadily

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 377, 382.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.



employed Canadians.<sup>15</sup> The effect, as Canada's chief statistician noted, was the "crystallization"<sup>16</sup> or "hardening" of lines between two classes of workers: "the one seldom employed, the other seldom unemployed."<sup>17</sup>

Gaps such as those noted between steadily employed and the less regularly employed wage-earners were also present within the salaried classes. Those able to reach positions in the middle ranks of modern business and administrative organizations found that the "educational ladder" which had allowed them entry did not lead to further improvement. The chance to move upward "came early on and then closed." Other points of entry and different routes were required to access the higher professions.<sup>18</sup>

Distinctions in the social structure reflected wage earning ability, but were seen as more complex. Class distinctions, Marsh wrote, were present in "the extent to which the members . . . meet on a plane of equality, while those who do not belong to it are conscious of a 'difference.'"<sup>19</sup> Insofar as the occupations associated with higher levels of social status required training, experience and connections, Marsh suggested that living standards were increasingly passed from parent to child. "Habits of behaviour"<sup>20</sup> reinforced and reproduced the existing class structure.

The form of the social structure Marsh described—with sloping sides rather than steps—softened class boundaries and preserved the sense that social mobility was

<sup>15</sup> Race and gender, it was observed, affected the likelihood of unemployment less than skill and occupation. In fact, because, women often worked in sectors of the economy (such as personal services) that were less affected by downturns, they tended to fare better during hard times. R. H. Coats, "Science and Society," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 5, No. 2, May 1939, p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> Coats, p. 165, see also Marsh, pp. 310-302, 378-379.

<sup>17</sup> Coats, p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> see Marshall, p. 339.

<sup>19</sup> Marsh, p. 381.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

possible. The divisions were seen as "shaded rather than abrupt" with extended margins and boundaries that could not be absolutely set. Because distinctions were a function of income rather than ownership, Marsh viewed these class groupings as essentially non-competing. Class conflict, however, had not so much disappeared as been displaced and internalized. Families positioned on the margins of each class found that their aspirations did not coincide with their spending ability. Tensions between classes had given way to tensions within the family unit.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, Marsh concluded that each "class" was defined by reference to two social areas: the area over which certain characteristic conventions and valuations were accepted, and the portion of the community subject to a certain set of economic conditions. He described the hiatus between these two criteria as "the discrepancy between fact and belief,"<sup>22</sup> and identified the psychological tension this discrepancy created as one of the important phenomena of modern society.

In the United States, the 1930s saw the widespread acceptance of concepts such as the American way of life and an American standard of living.<sup>23</sup> Marsh argued that if this meant a standard shared by a broadly based majority, it did not exist in Canada. While there was a common vision of a Canadian standard, the wages needed to support it were

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<sup>21</sup> Although Marsh did not directly cite Robert and Helen Lynd's classic 1929 study *Middletown*, his description of Canada's class structure and discussion of its social and psychological implications was very similar to theirs. The Lynds noted that, before the turn of the century, Middletowners appeared "to have lived on a series of plateaus as regards standards of living....Today [mid-1920s] the edges of the plateaus have been shaved off, and everyone lives on the slope from any point of which desirable things belonging to people all the way up to the top are in view." This change, they explained, intensified the frustrating effort to join those above and to gain distance from those below. Cited in Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 400-401.

<sup>23</sup> Susman, *Culture as History*, pp. 154-155. While the idea not new to the thirties, it became commonplace during this era.

not the wages of the majority.<sup>24</sup> While more Canadians were wage-earners than ever before, the persistence of agriculturalists and farm labourers slowed the emergence of middle class and working class patterns of consumption. In 1931, for example, farmers and farmer workers still made up thirty-five percent of the male working population in Canada, but only twenty-two percent in the United States and 6.4 percent in England and Wales. Moreover, the wages paid for similar occupations were generally lower in Canada. The middle class standard of living, which Marsh described as enabling a liberal and varied diet, housing accommodation which includes a few domestic labour saving devices, reasonable provision for health and recreation" the middle class was more a function of income than occupation, requiring at the most frugal calculation \$2,000 annually.<sup>25</sup> An income of this level would be characteristic only of managerial, professional and the uppermost levels of wage and salary earners, all-in-all not more than a quarter of all Canadian families.<sup>26</sup> There was, therefore, according to Marsh no justification for the concept of "a middle class" comprising a social area comparable to manual wage-earners or farm families.

In the face of statistical evidence, Marsh suggested that the prevalence of middle class ideals was the result of the increased visibility, rather than the numerical strength of

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199. Marsh proposed that in 1931 not more than 55 per cent of employee families attained a minimum living from the earnings of the breadwinner alone. Another 15 to 20 percent could reach this minimum with contributions by working sons, daughters or wives. The wages needed to allow for a small margin of comfort with better housing and clothing, would be at least \$1500 in the larger cities, which was the average earned by skilled tradesmen and white-collar workers. The wages needed to provide access to the "amenities of modern civilized life" with a liberal and varied diet, a few domestic labour saving devices, and reasonable provision for health and recreation were earned by less than one quarter of all Canadian families.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

the middle class. The middle class family was concentrated in urban centers, tended to dominate the new trades and services and, because they traveled frequently, spread their example through the country and abroad. Industrial wage earners were greater in number but immobilized by the absence of leisure time and more limited financial resources. The middle class family, he also noted, was the image adopted by advertisers for the purposes of sales campaigns.

Other social scientists, including University of Toronto economist D. C. MacGregor, questioned the existence of a broad middle class standard. Reviewing data published by a group of Toronto welfare agencies under the title "The Cost of Living—A Study of the Cost of a Standard of Living in Toronto Which Should Maintain Health and Self-Respect," MacGregor mocked the presentation of spending patterns that ignored "bargain sales, 'seconds,' second-hand shops, and the 'articles for sale' column in the evening papers. Is the standard of self-respect endangered . . . by trying to make a dollar go as far as possible? . . . A world in which everyone could . . . buy only new, branded articles at standard prices, in which no one patronized second-hand shops and in which no one need rely on free clinics or other government assistance would be one kind of Utopia."<sup>27</sup> This Utopia, he objected, would be well beyond the reach of a male adult

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<sup>27</sup>D. C. MacGregor, "Studies of the Cost of Living in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 4, November 1941, pp. 557-558. MacGregor also made reference to a study prepared by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics that involved, for the first time, the detailed survey of actual family budgets. A sample of 6,252 households was identified in twelve cities across Canada using census data and random selection. All families were of the wage-earner type with husband and a wife living together as joint heads, in a self-contained dwelling unit, all had from one to five children and not more than one lodger or domestic living in the home (no limitation was set for households in Quebec and Montreal), family earnings were to range from \$450 to \$2,500 for the survey year. Families kept track of living costs on a very detailed ten page schedule. Specially trained staff workers supervised the project. The effort to



earning minimum wage. The standard idealized in these reports had no basis in a reality where making ends meet remained a concern and buying new was far from ordinary.

As consumption opportunities increased, other observers noted that "a serious decline in the practice of thrift" seemed to have taken place.<sup>28</sup> In a brief prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, J. A. Corry, a professor of economics and political science at Queen's University, suggested that the lack of saving opportunities and the proliferation of consumer goods were jointly responsible.<sup>29</sup> In a

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determine normative standards was also a significant departure from past efforts, and is indicative of the shift underway from moral to normative approaches to consumption. The introduction of a 1932 study investigating the consumption of luxury goods suggests the struggle this represented and is worth quoting at length. The conception of luxury, it was explained, "is continually undergoing change. Silk stockings, for example, which formerly were considered a luxury, are today considered a necessity even by girls who are getting as low a wage as possible. The same is true of many other articles of food, clothing and furniture. . . The conception of luxuries also differ from place to place. Higher priced clothes, for example, which to an office employee in the city are a necessity become a luxury to a person similarly employed in a rural district. . . For the purposes of this report it has, therefore been decided to include all articles made in Canada which are actually above the line of necessities." In spite of the interest in consumption, the data used to compile the tables which followed were based on the production figures and the selling values at the factory. The amount actually spent in terms of retail prices was not available. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Family Income and Expenditure in Canada, 1937-1938, A Study of Urban Wage Earner Families* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1941); Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Consumption of Luxuries in Canada, 1931 and 1932* (Ottawa).

<sup>28</sup> J. A. Corry, *The Growth of Government Activities Since Confederation, A Study Prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa, 1939), p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> Savings opportunities in the form of banking were of course neither new or lacking. What Corry is referring to is the motivation to save. The shift to salaried and waged income, and the collapse of many farms and small businesses during the depression, eroded the incentive of ownership. Without this incentive, Corry believed that the propensity to save was diminished. Although Corry sees increases in spending as money not saved, it has been suggested that working and middle class North Americans perceived the purchase of some goods, particularly of durable goods, as an alternative form of investment and savings. See Onley, Martha, *Buy Now, Pay Later: Advertising, Credit and Consumer Durables in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

simpler society, he explained, farmers and businessmen could be persuaded to save by building up their own enterprises. In urban society, wage earners might invest their savings in home ownership, but the need for labour to preserve mobility generally discouraged savings in immovable investments. "At the same time," Corry observed, "an increasing proportion of our population live in urban centers, where all sorts of attractive gadgets and diversions are always on display. The daily contact with these things multiplies wants and, combined with the blandishments of modern advertising, it breaks down sales resistance. People become so much less able to sacrifice the enjoyment of today for the security of tomorrow."<sup>30</sup> The greater thriftiness of rural and village folk could be "to a considerable extent, explained by the lack of temptations."<sup>31</sup> Thrift, it now seemed, had not been a moral virtue but merely the lack of temptation.

Highlighting middle class values while questioning the existence of a significant number of middle class incomes, Marsh, McGregor and Corry implied that the middle class was more a state of mind than an achieved standard of living. Given how few Canadians could apparently afford this ideal, it was evident that most of those who aspired to middle class status would find themselves living in a state of perpetual tension.

### **Consuming Families**

The problem of social relations in a world with an abundance of goods and a shortage of money was a frequent theme in the literature of these years. Canadian literary scholar Evelyn MacLure has described 1935-1940 as a transitional period "when

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

tradition was strong, but the story shifting its concerns to man in society."<sup>32</sup> While commercial fiction tended to remain formulaic, committed to idyllic happy-ending stories of romantic rural adventure, those writers who published in Canada's literary, academic and political journals began to explore the changing lives of working class and middle class families.<sup>33</sup> Character was often revealed by the way in which people related to material goods. New tensions emerged between generations and genders divided by new spending practices. New experiences were given meaning and moral significance. The world of modern consumption intruded in almost all stories, at the very least in the form of advertising images, packages, labels, makeup and cars. Short stories and novels frequently featured plot conflicts that involved the purchase of mass produced goods or new objects of consumer culture. Lack of money leads to problems in communication that drives husbands and wives apart.<sup>34</sup> Certainly some of these tensions were accentuated by the lingering poverty of the depression, but they also described what would increasingly be regarded as "the budgetary poverty of ordinary families."<sup>35</sup>

During this period Morley Callaghan and Sinclair Ross were among Canada's best known and most consistently published authors. In their writings consumer goods are objects of desire that symbolize a more romantic and exciting world of color, glamour and gaiety beyond the drab confines of working class or farm life. Unfortunately, those who reach for these goods seldom find contentment. A blue kimono that once symbolized the "bright dreams and aspirations" becomes ragged. The red shoes in the

<sup>32</sup> Evelyn MacLure, *The Short Story in Canada: Development from 1935 to 1955*, M. A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Alistair Macleod, in Morley Callaghan, *The Complete Short Stories, Vol. I* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 2003), p. xiv.

shop window are purchased, but have to be dyed black for a funeral. A wife succumbs to the temptation of a stylish hat, but is berated by her husband for her foolish purchase.

Insofar as new purchases and acquisitions linked each subject, however briefly, with a larger world of romance and imagination, writers seemed to sympathize with those who yearned for more. Commercial goods transfixed those who desired them, offering the illusion of escape, but the consequences of giving into temptation were never beneficial. Shopping in these stories seldom involved ordinary processes of domestic consumption, such as grocery shopping. Consumer desires reached out to items which, however modestly priced, were beyond the realm of basic necessity--almost, but not quite, affordable. Objects of desire pitted selfish yearnings against the traditional order of the family. Women, children and young lovers return again and again to gaze through shop windows at the goods they desire but which prudence and lack of income prevent them from acquiring. Insofar as the importance of these goods is not in their usefulness but in their symbolism, they point to the values of consumer rather than producer culture. Poverty of spirit was often linked with the inability to buy things.

Cultural theorists argue that consumption can be a means to agency and an opportunity for self-determination eroded or contested in other areas.<sup>36</sup> Most Canadian authors in this period, however, did not present consumption as an act of liberation but as an act fraught with confusion and multiple meanings.<sup>37</sup> Husbands and fathers are

<sup>36</sup> James Livingston, "Modern Subjectivity and Consumer Culture," in Strasser, McGovern and Judt, pp. 413-429. See also McGovern's comments on Livingston, *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> MacLure comments that the belief in humble virtues is, perhaps, a particularly Canadian attitude, where suspiciousness of elegance has always been common. p. 88.



reluctant to give up their work identities and their authority as breadwinners.<sup>38</sup> Decisions to spend money inevitably generated tensions and were the cause of family conflict. The transition from window shopping to ownership is empowering, but often only temporarily so: baseball caps are stolen, red shoes dyed black and stylish hats brutally destroyed. In Callaghan's stories the desired items are almost always of personal clothing, suggesting that identity rather than agency is involved; however the distinction is not entirely clear. Generally those who dream more widely, about circuses and trips to Paris, have the least ability to make actual purchases.

In many stories class boundaries take the form of store windows and displays: working class people can see the goods they desire but cannot afford. "Normal" was a contested issue in a changing society characterized by rapid increases in the availability, if not always the affordability, of material goods. The tired mother in a short story by

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<sup>38</sup> Although fictional wage earners were primarily adult and male, the conflicts introduced into real Canadian families by new spending and wage earning opportunities were complex. The expansion of the clerical, sales and service sectors since the turn of the century and the vulnerability of jobs in manufacturing and primary resources during the depression often shifted breadwinning responsibilities from male to female household members. Insofar as female wage earning was a response to lost or insufficient income, family purchasing power may have been only modestly affected. In a similar way, the benefits of a combined household economy, a practical response in a pre-industrial, agrarian or transitional economy, were less significant in the modern context. Although it was often assumed that family incomes included contributions from many members, analysis showed that payments by sons, daughters and wives were a factor in less than ten per cent of families. The contributions made by family members, were moreover, a short-lived phenomena as sons and daughters generally reached the age of marriage before they attained their maximum earnings. Since a larger number of wage earners also meant a larger number of consumers, the additional income did not tend to increase a family's overall standard of living. While the income brought into households by working women and children was not large it undoubtedly added tensions to the negotiation of earnings and spending in real life, if not in fiction. Marsh, pp. 170-173, Katrina Srigley, "'In case you hadn't noticed!': Race, Ethnicity and Women's Wage-Earning in a Depression-Era City," *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 55 (Spring 2005); Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, Vol. 4, 1979.

another Canadian author, Mary Quayle Innis, is typical.<sup>39</sup> Wandering the aisles of the home furnishings section in a large department store, consuming goods in her imagination, she dreams of what might have been and what will never be, but is ultimately forced to keep moving, to leave the building and to return to her own life. These fictional potential consumers are, by and large, unable to attain the goods they encounter in public settings such as shop windows and department stores, frustrated in their aspiration to bring these goods into their private lives. While Marsh insisted that social status increasingly involved the display of goods, Canadian authors from Leacock to Callaghan tended to cast doubt on the moral character of those able to display items of current fashion or luxury. Those who were materially well-off, they suggest, were often lacking in inner virtue.

Romantic consumption in these stories was not the dream of wage-earners seeking compensation for the monotony of routine labour. The yearning for new experiences in the form of goods was the dream of those who earned no wages, regardless of whether they were in positions of dependency as wives and children or were unemployed. Resistance to the temptations of commodity consumption comes, not from self-aware individuals rejecting pressures to buy, but from those whose authority and stature in the family is threatened by economic change. The dreamers (almost always women and children) are pitted against the wage earners (almost always men). While

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Quayle Innis, "Holiday," *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 136, January 1932, pp. 140-142. This short story is usefully read in conjunction with Cynthia Wright "Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance: Writing Gender into the History of Consumption," in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (eds), *Gender Conflicts in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) which explores gender and class issues in the spatial organization of Eaton's College Street store in Toronto during the same period, pp. 244-250.

consumption was clearly gendered, neither gender was particularly empowered or fulfilled. Producers and consumers were both, in different ways, victims of economic and social processes.

While the satisfaction attained by consumption was clearly fleeting, the larger moral lesson of each experience remained ambiguous. Were the possibilities of consumption and the transformations of identity and the gratification of desire opportunities or traps? Do these characters dream of goods because they have, as yet, escaped the soul-destroying rhythms of the assembly line and the disheartening struggle with the land, or because they are selfish? Does romantic consumption offer meaningful resistance or only the illusion of escape? The authors were never clear: they sympathized with the yearning for more but seemed to regard desire as destabilizing and not entirely legitimate. What was evident was that themes of consumption and the tensions created between wage earner and wage spender had begun to capture the imaginations of Canadian authors.

The frustrations of living in consumer society without the ability to consume were common to all narratives. The claim is not that Canada's literary community explicitly began to consider something called consumer culture. Their concerns remained those of family and identity. Husbands and wives argue, lovers quarrel and make-up, sons disappoint their mothers, and daughters resent their fathers. However, these stories of families in tension reveal the extent to which traditional identities had been challenged and even destabilized by the transitions of a consumer economy. Thus the yearnings of working class children and women for goods and experiences threatened the stability of the family unit, forcing husbands and fathers to acknowledge their weakness. Desire is

often represented as a threat to the moral and social order of the traditional family. But efforts to contain desire and repress dreams are often quite brutal. Denying the values of consumption brought no honour.

Other studies of fictional literature written during the depression and post-depression years have commented that Canadian authors tended to present the working man as a victim of capitalism, trapped in hopeless situations that end in the urge toward self-annihilation or illusory escape.<sup>40</sup> Manual labour was degrading, the assembly line reduced men to unthinking machines, the family farm was an economic impossibility in a world of large scale commodity production, carting and canning operations. Meanwhile, the spectre of unemployment loomed large. In this view, whether employed or unemployed, workers were frustrated by mechanized society and unable to adapt. Work was devalued and no longer able to offer status or act as a source of meaningful identity.<sup>41</sup> Seldom was evidence offered of any trend toward political organization or revolutionary action.<sup>42</sup> The unemployed did not form a militant class, but seemed frustrated by free time without money.<sup>43</sup> Wages remained essential, but the moral value of work was cast in doubt. As Stephen Leacock explained, it was no longer "true that a

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<sup>40</sup> Catharine Robinson, *Some Effects of Social Change on the English Canadian Novel and Periodical Fiction, 1920-1955*, M. A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1960, p. 71.

<sup>41</sup> Ken Hughes, however, disagrees, rationalizing these attitudes by explaining that Canadian writers "knew" that the working class was neither large enough nor sufficiently united to win any revolutionary confrontations. Hughes points instead to the presence of a radical tradition that explicitly promoted working class consciousness, particularly through dramatizations of the dehumanization of mechanized production that forced workers to accept passive roles if they wanted to receive the income needed to feed their families. Kenneth J. Hughes in the introduction to Donna Phillips, ed. *Voices of Discord: Canadian Short Stories from the 1930s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1979), p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-71.

<sup>43</sup> Cross, p. 74.



man is *worth* what he gets and gets what he's *worth*."<sup>44</sup>

Middle class jobs in the modern economy offered no greater fulfillment. Andrew Aikenhead, one of the central characters in Morley Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, came to doubt his role as an advertising executive: "It was a terrible thing for a man to feel suddenly that he had devoted his life to convincing people they wanted things they did not want, that he had created imaginary passions and lusts in the breasts of millions just to provide them with imaginary satisfaction."<sup>45</sup> Aikenhead's son is an engineer, but Callaghan is clear that his job is little different. When hired by the city electric company, his job is to devise plans that will encourage homeowners to install electric heaters in order to stimulate the economy.<sup>46</sup> While the son does not suffer from the doubts that plague his father, Callaghan suggests that there is little difference between jobs in a world suffering from over-production.

In a similar vein, the difference between city and country, a traditional theme in Canadian writing, was becoming less marked. The contrast between rural life (whether virtuous or idyllic) and the superficialities of the city as a place where the forces of materialism triumphed, had been a persistent theme in Canadian writing. While nature in its raw state was still revered, portraits of rural life grew increasingly grim. In an age of modern transportation and communication, the lines that had once divided city and country were becoming less firm. Farmers as well as workers were trapped by mechanization and overproduction. Decades earlier Leacock had already mocked the

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Leacock, "What is left of Adam Smith?" *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 1. No. 1. February 1935, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Morley Callaghan, *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, 1934 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

rising materialism of rural communities.<sup>47</sup> In the post depression stories this distaste was frequently mitigated by sympathy for those trapped in drab rural settings who saw the glamour of city life and the world of modern goods as possible alternatives. Increasingly farm families were isolated by the lack of money rather than distance.

Examining the moral implications of the transition from scarcity to abundance and glut, it is unclear whether work or consumption was regarded as more essential. In *The Master of the Mill*, for example, it was the decision to suspend collection of rents and give the workers displaced by machines free access to the company store that precipitated armed revolt.<sup>48</sup> The men wanted jobs, not goods or charity. In the face of tremendous unemployment and considerable economic insecurity, it is not clear that Canadians as individuals defined themselves exclusively as consumers.<sup>49</sup> Many autobiographical accounts continued to emphasize production, family and friendships. Similarly, most continued to be set in rural locales which, while still a significant part of the Canadian experience, were becoming less representative. There is little evidence available to help determine if the absence of work or the inability to consume was more important in the forging of personal identity during these years. It remains unclear if empowerment came with earning or spending or to what degree these could be separated. While many

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, 1912.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick Philip Grove, *The Master of the Mill* (1944), (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), p. 316.

<sup>49</sup> However, a recent study by Katrina Srigley demonstrates a strong link between relief clothes and self-identity in the 1930s. Women used clothing to assert, construct and contest identities, whether by day dreaming about clothing as a way to escape the drudgery of daily life or "dressing the part" for a job interview. Using oral history to explore the "consumption memories" of a large and diverse group of workingwomen who lived in Toronto during the Depression, Srigley shows that apparel could operate as a strong indicator of a person's status or desired status, as well as a tool for increasing employability. Katrina Srigley, "Clothing Stories, Consumption, Identity, and Desire in Depression-Era Toronto," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2007.

continued to regard consumption with suspicion, others suggested that consumer practices had taken on therapeutic value. In his autobiographical account of his depression experiences, James Gray observed that "the monotony of an existence without money created strains that had to be worked off. In that sense, a movie a week was as necessary as an occasional ice-cream cone for the children, or twenty-five cents of ribbon with which to retrim a hat."<sup>50</sup> The necessity of what was only recently regarded as frivolous spending, the emphasis on the psychological rather than material necessity of spending, pointed to significant shifts underway in the relations of working and middle class Canadians to consumer goods.

#### **The Commodification of Intellectual Effort**

The problems of commodification and the challenges of the mass market, present within Canadian stories, also formed the context in which the authors worked. In a 1938 essay entitled "The Plight of Canadian Fiction" Morley Callaghan argued that a hypothetical young writer "who had an authentic talent for creative prose, and wanted to develop it honestly" had little or no chance to do so in Canada.<sup>51</sup> The young writer, desirous of being published, could choose to "sit down and study the fiction market offered by the big magazines . . . if he is intelligent and not impatient and has the gift at all, he may succeed in giving the editors the thing they want. He meets the market...In no time at all he may have an enormous income, because there are vast profits to be made from writing for the big slick magazines." However, success in this form of writing required that the author "is always saying the thing that people want to have said." To be

<sup>50</sup> James Gray, *The Winter Years* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> Morley Callaghan, "The Plight of Canadian Fiction," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1938, pp. 152-161.

successful, the enterprising young author must purge his stories of personal qualities that might separate him "from the masses." He must make no demands and avoid making the reader feel uncomfortable or unhappy. Most important of all, Callaghan insisted in an extended parody, the reader should never be deeply moved as "he might start brooding. And no magazine ever had a big circulation of brooders." Callaghan described writing of this sort was "a field of entertainment like vaudeville."

Callaghan went on to compare those who produced stories for the mass market with "the writer who wanted to have his own growth and look at reality with his own eyes." Over time this writer might win an audience, but he would find no opportunity to publish within Canada. The market was too small, in part due to demographics, but also, Callaghan insisted, because there was no demand in Canada for thoughtful works. While the reading public was growing, the audience for thoughtful writing was small and declining as a percentage of the total. Canadians bought books, but they bought books much as they bought other commodities—tea bags was the example Callaghan used to make his point—and not for spiritual gratification. In such an environment, he asked, "if there was no demand, was Canadian literature really necessary?"

Frederick Phillip Grove offered a reply in a subsequent issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, insisting that Callaghan had been "too easy" on the Canadian public, its critics and its writers, and that he had failed to properly consider the problem.<sup>52</sup> Callaghan, Grove objected, had spoken about writers as professionals who make their living by writing. The true writer, he objected, the writer who "goes on year after year doing the thing he loves in his own way" did not write for money. For this writer "no

<sup>52</sup> Frederick Philip Grove, "The Plight of Canadian Fiction? A Reply," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 4, July 1938, pp. 451-467.



'living' is in sight *in no matter what country, at no matter what time*" because great writers had to create the taste by means of which they would be appreciated. Moreover, Grove added, in his own case his most financially remunerative works had been his least successful artistically. Their pecuniary achievements, he insisted, were due to publicity and promotion rather than literary merit.

The exchange reveals the challenges writers perceived they faced as they negotiated the transition from writing as a high culture practice to publishing as cultural industry. It speaks to the way these authors regarded mass consumption, but also to their need to earn a living in an age and in a country with more writers than opportunities to publish. Was the goal of art to make contact with transcendent truths or to reach the audience? How did one reconcile the costs of publishing in an age of mass production with the romantic ideal of the isolated, struggling artistic soul? Was the modern writer, particularly the writer of short stories, producing commodities or literature? Authors who wanted to reach large audiences, as well as those who hoped to earn a living solely by writing, could not simply reject the mass media. The temptations and dangers they associated with consuming commodities, were experienced in the contradiction between their commitment to art and their role as producers of consumable goods.

The conflict between the integrity of cultural and intellectual production and the pressures of commodification were widely felt. British sociologist T. H. Marshall, in an address to the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Political Scientists later published in the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, noted similar challenges facing the professions. Once conceived of as a member of a select body, the professional had been distinguished by his pecuniary indifference, the presence of leisure

time, and the freedom to choose work according to his own sense of what was right rather than what might be profitable. Modern conditions, Marshall observed, had undermined the relevance of traditional markers of achievement and success. Leisure was no longer a spiritual quality denoting a higher calling, but "merely the way one spends one's money when the day's work is done. The way money is earned is increasingly unimportant. It is the quantity that matters. The business man's leisure is as good as anyone else's because leisure is simply the antithesis to work."<sup>53</sup> The professions, no longer able to ignore their wage earning aspect, sought to redefine their task as labour of a special and superior kind that involved the provision of services rather than commodities and the demonstration of judgment and understanding as well as special skills. Professional services were repositioned as those that could not be mass produced or offered in cheaper lines to a broader market. No longer outside of the market, professionals sought to create a special niche within the market where their skills could be accorded extra value.

The problems of the artist and the professional were also the problems of the economist and the social scientist. Did these disciplines seek larger truths or provide practical solutions? Did economists serve "truth," "society," or whoever paid the bill? The problem was also the result of increasing employment opportunities and temptations of power and money that lay beyond the university. In a period when academic salaries were gradually declining and social status increasingly became a function of purchasing power, the appeal of outside work was considerable.<sup>54</sup> Social scientists, University of

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<sup>53</sup> T. H. Marshall, "The Recent History of Professionalism in Relation to Social Structure and Social Policy," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 5, No. 3, August 1939, p. 326.

<sup>54</sup> Barry Ferguson and Doug Owsram, "Social Scientists and Public Policy from the 1920s through World War II," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Winter 1980-1981,

Toronto economist Harold Innis caustically observed, "are in great demand at the prevailing rate among business firms, including publishers, governments, and political parties."<sup>55</sup>

Efforts to assess the state of political economy were characteristic of the late depression years. "What is Left of Adam Smith?" Stephen Leacock asked the members of the Canadian Political Science Association in 1934.<sup>56</sup> Leacock charged that political economy was intellectually "bankrupt" and unable to provide the answers society needed. The first question of political economy, "How does mankind produce enough goods for the wants of mankind?" had been answered long ago.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the second question, "How can mankind adjust its production so as not to over satisfy some, under satisfy others and break down in the process" had never been answered. Leacock claimed that theories of political economy were unable to provide any answers. Having exchanged Adam Smith's economics of scarcity for a new "economics of abundance," society found that the problem "is not the control of nature but the control of man."<sup>58</sup> Laissez-faire methods did not lead to social welfare. Instead governments and economists had to move beyond principles of "letting things happen" to make things happen.

Although Leacock was reiterating many of the themes he had been writing about

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pp. 6-7.

<sup>55</sup> Harold Innis, "The Passing of Political Economy," *Commerce Journal*, March 1938, p. 5. As the newly appointed Head of the Department of Political Economy, Innis had been asked to prepare an article for the University's *Commerce Journal* on a topic that would be of interest to business men as readers or as advertisers. Innis viewed this request as evidence of the passing of political economy.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Leacock, "What is left of Adam Smith?" *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1935.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> Frank Knight, "Social Science and the Political Trend," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 3, 1934, pp. 407-427, in Frank Knight, *Freedom and Reform, Essays in Economics and Social Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1982), p. 47.

for the past twenty years, the depression had given a new immediacy to his concerns.

Few Canadian economists were as willing to jettison classical theory, but most had come to believe that government intervention in the form of planning might help to stabilize the Canadian economy. They continued to reject increases in mass consumption as an appropriate response to economic problems of the depression, even though the public, many politicians, and many prominent economists in other nations had begun to advocate aggregate consumer spending as a vehicle of growth. And yet, even those who continued to resist the appeal to consumer spending could not ignore the impact of the "call to management" which was transforming universities into reserve pools of labour.

The shifting relationship between the social sciences and society—the theme at the core of Leacock's address—was also central to two other influential articles published at this time. In an essay contributed to the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, the senior American economist Frank Knight complained that trained economists were being put and were putting themselves in the position of appealing to the crowd, "competing to sell to the public ideas and doctrines which they could not sell to each other."<sup>59</sup> Making the crowd the judge of intellectual differences "assumed that selection by the ultimate consumer will produce agreement on the 'fittest' alternative."<sup>60</sup> The criterion of truth-seeking fundamental to intellectual progress was being displaced by the idea of social direction by popular discussion. Intellectual discourse was being geared toward the identification of "marketable products."<sup>61</sup> The appeal of charismatic leaders and the movement for planning and control, Knight argued, were both symptoms of loss of faith

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.



in intelligence as an agency for social problem-solving.<sup>62</sup> The challenge was not to fight for truth (to resort to techniques of persuasion was to join the enemy), but to stand against the trend, and preserve in a small area an atmosphere where reasonable men could engage in the process of co-operative discussion.

While Knight called upon economists to preserve objectivity in the search for truth, E. J. Urwick, the Head of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, deplored the "disastrous results" of the Age of Reason. Addressing "The Role of Intelligence in the Social Process," he mocked the futility of intellectual processes which required that parts be separated from the whole and "devitalized," "desiccated," "sterilized" and "abstracted from life" in order to be examined.<sup>63</sup> Social science, he objected, was a contradiction in terms because social scientists were necessarily caught up in the processes they were trying to examine. In any case, facts could not tell what should and must be done. Like Knight, Urwick argued that discussion was the best guide to determining the goals of life. Unlike Knight, Urwick regarded progress as moral and spiritual in nature. The means to truth was not reason but "*feeling . . . rooted in life and all that life has learned and all that life has dreamed.*"<sup>64</sup> Objectivity in the social sciences was not only impossible, it was irrelevant. Intuition, informed by feeling and desire, enlarged and ordered by discussion, determined the ends and value of human achievement: "what I *like*, what I desire, determines not only my choices, but my judgment of ends to be chosen and of values to be accepted."<sup>65</sup> Although Urwick argued

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>63</sup> E. J. Urwick, "The Role of Intelligence in the Social Process" *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 1. No. 1, February 1935, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74. See also E. J. Urwick, *A Philosophy of Social Progress* (London: 1912), p.

that the goals of society were subjective, he rejected the role of the public in setting them. In the face of public pressure for more protection, more supervision and especially for more utilities and services, government was becoming a "Universal Service Organization." "WANTING things" had replaced thinking about things.<sup>66</sup> The "unlimited and illimitable" demand for more inevitably led to increasingly remote and autocratic methods of control and supervision that were incompatible with responsive democratic government.

Leacock urged economists to do something. Knight called for a sphere of discussion dedicated to truth seeking apart from the realm of politics. Urwick denounced not only the drift to planning but reason itself, urging attention to feelings, albeit informed by intelligent discussion. All of these responses---the call for action, the call for seclusion, and the call for informed intuition---positioned themselves against the trend to measurement, prediction and control. Addressing the relationship of the social sciences to the progress of society, Leacock, Knight and Urwick uniformly rejected the expansion of managerial, statistical, and quantitative approaches to economics. They also challenged disciplinary specialization as hostile to the philosophical and ethical concerns which they saw as lying at the heart of the social sciences.<sup>67</sup>

Harold Innis, a generation younger, grouped the three economists together, suggesting that the pervading tone of pessimism might be the result of psychological

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vii; Robert Park, "Review: A Philosophy of Social Progress by E. J. Urwick," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 27, No. 5, March 1922; John Macdonald, "Reviews of Books," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 15, No. 1, February 1949, pp. 97-99, John Irving, "Introduction" to E. J. Urwick, *The Values of Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948).

<sup>66</sup> E. J. Urwick, "Wither Are We Drifting?" *Canadian Forum*, Vol. 15, July 1935, p. 306.

<sup>67</sup> Judith Stamp, *Unthinking Modernity: Innis, McLuhan and the Frankfurt School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995), p. 46-47.

disillusionment rooted in the anxieties of recent experiences of war and depression.<sup>68</sup> But he also shared their concerns, which he observed could be "repeated and extended." Links with political parties, government, church groups, and charitable foundations biased economists to recommend controls and plans that would lead to the particular end goals favoured by each institution. Belief in progress reinforced the importance of change and introduced pressures to innovate. All of these conditions encouraged economists to write what their audiences wanted to hear. The situation in the universities was little better. Departmental routines interfered with the search for truth and the university itself encouraged professors to be visible.<sup>69</sup> The social sciences, Innis charged, had become the opiate of the people.<sup>70</sup> The intellectual had become a "tragi-comic figure," the "vestige" of an era of discussion that had passed, a symbol of commitments to freedoms that were no longer supported in fact.

According to Innis the problem of objectivity was one of economics rather than philosophy. It was the political economy of consumer society, he frequently argued, that undermined informed public discussion. Phenomenal increases in the production of goods and the demand for more efficient methods of distribution stimulated the expansion of newspaper production. In order to meet the high overhead costs, newspapers had become increasingly dependent upon advertisers and their need to reach the widest possible audience. The quality of informed discussion, Innis asserted, had

<sup>68</sup> H. A. Innis, "The Role of Intelligence: Some Further Notes," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 1. No. 2, May 1935, p. 280.

<sup>69</sup> Harold Innis, "Discussion in the Social Sciences," *Dalhousie Review*, Vol. XV, 1935-1936. Innis noted that this article was a compliment to his earlier comments.

<sup>70</sup> Innis, "The Role of Intelligence: Some Further Notes," p. 286.

weakened in proportion to the expansion of efforts to stimulate mass consumption.<sup>71</sup>

Sustained thought on difficult problems was made impossible by the short attention spans cultivated by the desire for quick returns. The problems of marketing had "far reaching ramifications in a democracy."<sup>72</sup> At the same time, Innis rejected what he saw as a false distinction between the possibilities of objectivity and subjectivity. The social scientist, Innis believed, could not be "scientific" or "objective" in the conventional sense.<sup>73</sup>

However, he could struggle against becoming a mere producer of commodities preoccupied with the problems of social adjustment or technical management.

The role of social scientists in contemporary society was a theme that would preoccupy economists and political scientists until the outbreak of war changed the agenda.<sup>74</sup> Canadian political journalist and historian Frank Underhill took up the discussion in the following issue of *CJEPS*, by denouncing Innis's position as "retirement to the ivory tower."<sup>75</sup> "The picture of the disinterested scientist," Underhill claimed, was "only possible in an era of complacent stability . . . when all the ultimate values and objectives of society were taken for granted . . . To-day in an era when values and ends are again in question the social scientist, however he may pose, cannot disassociate

<sup>71</sup> Innis, "Discussion in the Social Sciences," p. 404.

<sup>72</sup> Harold Innis, "Introduction," in J. McKee (ed), *Marketing, Organization and Technique* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1940), p. xvii.

<sup>73</sup> Innis, "The Role of Intelligence: Some Further Notes," p. 283; Stamp, pp. 48-49.

<sup>74</sup> Other articles that situated themselves within this discussion include C. B. McPherson, "Pareto's 'General Sociology': The Problem of Method in the Social Sciences," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 3, August 1937, especially pp. 470-471; E. K. Brown, "On Academic Freedom," *Dalhousie Review*, 1936-1937, see especially pp. 222-223, 226-227.

<sup>75</sup> F. A. Underhill, "The Conception of a National Interest," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 1. No. 3, August 1935, p. 407.



himself from considering them."<sup>76</sup> Underhill denounced Innis's ideal of the detached scientist as "the opiate of our academic intellectuals."<sup>77</sup> The role of the intellectual in society, he asserted, was to step forward and, having identified the ends and objectives most consistent with the progressive and democratic thrust of Canadian history, to devise the means to reach them.

Important essays by economists D. A. MacGibbon and W. A. Mackintosh rejected both the "call-to-arms" issued by Leacock and Underhill and the more philosophical concerns of Knight, Urwick and Innis. While situating their responses in the context of this extended debate, both men asserted the scientific credentials of economics, upholding the possibility and the principles of a morally neutral, instrumental practice.

MacGibbon insisted that the problem of objectivity lay not in economics at all but in the ideal of progress. The experiences of war and depression had called the quality of modern civilization and the nature of its economic arrangements into doubt. Different social groups, it was clear, developed different values, often antipathetic to each other. As there appeared to be no criteria for determining that one set of values was superior to the other, economics must either forgo judgments on social progress or forgo its claims to science.<sup>78</sup>

For MacGibbon there was no doubt which path economists should choose. The task of the economist was "to observe, to collect data, to verify hypotheses, and to analyze these phenomena with a view to developing a useful economic theory."<sup>79</sup> He

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> D. A. MacGibbon, "Economics and the Social Order," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1, February 1936, p. 69.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

dismissed as arrogance the idea that economists should determine and dictate society's ends. Insofar as values were relative and specific to each society, ends and objectives were a matter of social choice. Economists could only offer technical support, making careful studies of the various "new social models now on the market." It was not their task to choose between "the Stalin model," "the Hitler model," "the Mussolini model," or "the Aberhart model."<sup>80</sup> Always ready to render assistance when asked, economists worked within the framework of "an organized community which has determined its own ends."<sup>81</sup> The challenge for the social scientist, according to MacGibbon, was to provide the means, not to determine the ends. While Innis had argued that public opinion, shaped by character of the mass media, could not make thoughtful choices, McGibbon, perhaps exaggerating to make his point, reduced political preference to a matter of consumer economics and argued that the moral implications of different consumption choices were not the concern of economists.

When Queen's economist W. A. Mackintosh addressed the joint meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association and the Canadian Historical Association as the president of the CPSA, he similarly argued for an economics of moral neutrality and limited scope. "Economics is not the science of welfare,"<sup>82</sup> he explained, but rather "an application of reason and systematic thought to a limited field of human relations. Apart from the facts with which it deals, it leads to no definite program."<sup>83</sup> Economists should be neither "protagonists nor antagonists" in political debates; they must reject the

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>82</sup> W. A. Macintosh, "An Economist Looks at Economics," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. III, No. 3, August 1937, p. 321.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

temptations and rewards of public life. Economic theory prescribed no policy and enunciated no doctrine apart from the analysis of the particular facts of a problem.<sup>84</sup> Insofar as an economist "responds to a political party, to a social movement, or to a class interest, he does it as an individual citizen and not as an economist. His intellectual and moral integrity depends on maintaining the distinction."<sup>85</sup> Macintosh described the separation of philosophy and scientific thinking as "essential." The economist's task was to provide government with alternatives that "make clear the methods to be chosen in view of a stated end."<sup>86</sup>

Both MacGibbon and Mackintosh referred to the definition of economics recently proposed by British economist Lionel Robbins as "a science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses."<sup>87</sup> MacGibbon linked this definition to the exploration and study of economic life under several different types of social organization. Macintosh suggested that the ends were given, but not by economists. In a way, the responses of these Canadian thinkers to Robbins' definition captured the dilemmas that also confronted many of the families in the Callaghan and Ross stories. There was scarcity, but also more choice. In part it was felt a time of scarcity because there were so many new choices. The tensions between wage earning and wage spending that Canadian authors were exploring were recast as the problem of ends and means by economists. Were consumption practices to be socially or individually determined and according to what criteria? Who would make consumption decisions: the wage earner or the members of the family, the elected politicians or the

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>85</sup> W. A. Mackintosh, pp. 314-315.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>87</sup> MacGibbon, p. 71. See also Mackintosh, p. 321.

professional bureaucrats? Values were viewed as relative and, as MacGibbon indicated, ends and objectives as a matter of social choice. Moral positions were reframed as matters of choice rather than ultimate ends. Embracing the principle of detachment, they rejected any role in determining what ought to be. Commitment was inconsistent with scientific objectivity.<sup>88</sup> Economists must refrain from making judgments about what people's goals should be.

Mackintosh had noted in his presidential address that, in the years following the depression, the reputation of economists did not stand high in the general community.<sup>89</sup> The dilemma within the profession, however, was less the loss of prestige in tough times but the uncomfortable sense that the times had changed. There was a broadly shared perception that the increased productivity of modern industry and agriculture had solved the problem of basic needs. Political economists working nearer to the turn of the century, concerned about the corrosive social effects of modern industrialized processes, had hoped that consumption would provide opportunities for self-fulfillment and the reconstruction of society. Doug Owsen has examined the processes of professionalization and secularization which restructured movements of social reform and increasingly drew intellectuals towards institutional positions, first, in the academy, and then in the federal government. It remains to be noted that the shift in the emphasis

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<sup>88</sup> British historian Mathew Hilton notes that Keynesian theory (which was rapidly gaining acceptance in the mid-to-late thirties) made consumption central to economic growth, but abstracted it to such a degree that discussion of consumption at the microlevel was unnecessary. The degree of abstraction, in other words, enabled advocates to avoid consideration of the political and ethical aspects of demand, even while in pursuit of its management at the macro level. As Keynes had written, "virtue and vice play no part." Mathew Hilton, "The Legacy of Luxury, Moralities of consumption since the 18<sup>th</sup> century," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2004, pp. 113-115.

<sup>89</sup> Mackintosh, p. 313.



of political economy from wealth creation to what might be described as professional wealth management, echoed the values of organizational efficiency, regulation, administration, and predictability that were the hallmarks of modern industrial organization. Within the context of the university this meant reconfiguring political economy into specialized social sciences such as sociology and economics. In both the university and in government the collection, classification and interpretation of data were central to new practices. Marsh, for example, emphasized that the recognition of class differences did not imply class strife but merely provided "data" useful for "an alert democracy."<sup>90</sup> The practices of economics were increasingly technical and oriented to the collection of facts and the management of practical problems in the present. Sociology had become a science and not a way to do good. The idea of progress was to be detached from its ideological associations and conceived of as the prospect of control through measurement and technique. The specification of appropriate ends lay beyond the domain of the expert.<sup>91</sup>

### Conclusions

Increasing consumption was no longer regarded solely or simply as the path to a harmonious social order. The sloping class structure was characterized by the absence of firm footing and the ever present danger of sliding. In a decade that had been marked by "the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty," living standards had become an appropriate topic for investigation. It was increasingly the case that the tensions faced by Canadians families were not those of survival but of positioning. To be a wage earner was to be a wage spender; but earnings were limited while spending opportunities were

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<sup>90</sup> Marsh, p. 447.

<sup>91</sup> Susman provides an interpretation of the parallel American context. p. 116.

increasingly without limit. Families that divided the roles of earning and spending hoped to maximize efficiency by accepting this tension. Meanwhile the emotionally compelling qualities of consumer goods complicated the expression of relationships. In any case, after decades of material change the line between need and want was blurred and, in that context, familial tensions were both generational and gendered. In fictional representations of the Canadian family, parents tended to represent thrift, savings, self-restraint and the traditional values of a restricted economy while children pushed for spending, novelty, and expanded participation in the new economy of consumer experiences. As many, but certainly not all, of the traditional duties of the housewife were supplemented or displaced by new mechanics of shopping and budgeting, women found themselves in an ambiguous position. Consumption decisions made on behalf of the household were seen as dutiful, while personal spending continued to be regarded as self-indulgent. In advertisements touting values of labour saving devices, packaged foods and store-bought clothing it was not always clear which purchases belonged in which category. Insofar as women were associated with spending, their choices often became the locus of all society's doubts about consumption.

The tension between limited resources and unlimited needs were identified in the domestic economy, the workings of government, and in economic theory. The processes of the social sciences--the development of technique without a final purpose--echoed the forms and feelings of the working and middle class family where the available means would always be insufficient because the basket of available goods was expanding. The gap and the tension between fixed means and indeterminate ends was the structure of the emerging consumer society.

### 9. Controlling Consumption to Win the War and Reconstruction

War financing explicitly recognized the significance of aggregate consumer spending, seeking in some situations to restrict and in others to mobilize the purchasing power of Canadians for the war effort. By the time the military turning point of the war had been reached early in 1943, the unprecedented war effort had vastly expanded Canada's productive capacity and eliminated mass unemployment. Shortages of consumer goods and gains in consumer incomes through increased employment, higher wages, longer hours, forced savings, and allowances paid to families of service men had created a backlog in demand for goods and a tremendous reservoir of unexpended purchasing power.<sup>1</sup> Whether this would provide a positive stimulus to the economy, a temporary boom followed by economic collapse, or a spur to dangerous levels of inflation was unclear. If the implications of post-war consumption were uncertain, the prospects for production were even less clear. As the end of conflict approached, anxiety rose about the likelihood of a return to depression conditions. Faced with an economy historically dependent upon exports rather than domestic markets, policy makers framed programs to stabilize rather than grow the economy, hoping to preserve some of the gains of wartime expansion. Exports and capital investment were regarded as the keys to increased productivity and employment. Incentives to increase consumer spending were tempered by the fear of post-war inflation in an economy all but devoid of consumer goods. A contradiction emerged that saw consumer spending as an important component of the economy while insisting that wages must be moderate if exports were to remain competitive.

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<sup>1</sup> "How Are Canadians Using their War Earnings?" *Saturday Night*, June 26, 1943, p. 38. See also *Report*, Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, pp. 6-7.

Canada had entered the Second World War with a high proportion of idle resources. In the early months, surplus capacity meant that wartime needs could be met with little difficulty.<sup>2</sup> Increasing employment and enlistment in the armed forces were expected to increase purchasing power, stimulating the production of consumable goods as well as equipment for war. As University of Toronto economist A. F. W. Plumptre explained, "There may be more guns, more butter and more churns all at once."<sup>3</sup>

With the fall of France in the summer of 1940, demands on the Canadian economy increased rapidly. As existing factories expanded and new ones were rushed to completion, the economy reached the "zone of full employment."<sup>4</sup> The relief that Canadians felt as the economy gained strength was not shared by economists. While there were as yet no shortages, concerns mounted that higher wages and rapidly expanding civilian demand would act to misdirect the nation's productive capacity and drive up the costs of waging war. The following year, in October of 1941, the Prime Minister announced in a dramatic Saturday evening radio broadcast that the time to choose between guns and butter had arrived.<sup>5</sup> Domestic consumption would be controlled in

<sup>2</sup> K. W. Taylor, "Canadian War-Time Price Controls, 1941-6," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 13, No. 1, February 1947, p. 81; A. F. W. Plumptre, *Mobilizing Canada's Resources for War* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Plumptre, *Mobilizing Canada's Resources for War*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Federal contributions to the costs of direct relief continued until March 31, 1941, an indication of the slack created within the Canadian economy by almost a decade of depression.

<sup>5</sup> "Today, more than 1,000,000 Canadians are engaged in war service. . . The stage of taking up the slack of partial employment has now passed, and the need for more men for the armed forces and for war industry is still growing. We must face the fact that there are not enough men; there are not enough machines; there are not enough materials to meet the demands of consumers and the needs of war. Since the government, with the full support of the Canadian people, is determined to maintain and to intensify the war effort, we have no choice but to reduce our consumption of goods. To us, too, has come the



order that the needs of war could be fully met.

Canada's policy of wartime finance embodied new understandings of the economy in which consumer spending played a critical role.<sup>6</sup> As the Minister of Finance announced, "the task of finance is to provide the funds which are used to pay for war services. But in a deeper sense the task of finance is, by taxation and borrowing, to restrict the civilian demand for economic resources in order that they will be free when the defense or supply departments need them."<sup>7</sup> The challenge, explained Canadian political economist A. F. W. Plumptre, was not to finance the war through taxes, savings and inflation (i.e. the printing of money), but "to mould the economic system in accordance with the needs of war" controlling the entire economy conceived of in both its productive and consuming capacity.<sup>8</sup>

In 1940-1941 programmes were developed to implement this strategy, including a Canadian National Defense Tax to be deducted from wages by employers and Victory Bonds payable by installments or payroll deduction. Both taxation and savings, Plumptre wrote, would "repress spending" and restrict civilian demand, freeing resources for war

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choice between guns and butter." William L. M. King, "Controlling the cost of living: the stabilization of prices and wages," CBC radio broadcast October 18, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Plumptre believed that Canada's efforts to control monetary policy in this way were novel, rooted in understandings that had "seldom if ever been set down in black and white." See Plumptre, *Mobilizing Canada's Resources for War*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> July 1940, Cited in A. F. W. Plumptre, "An Approach to War Finance," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 1941, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. A graduate of and lecturer in Political Economy at University of Toronto, Plumptre had taken seminar work with Keynes at Cambridge. In the early years of the war, he was Canada's representative to the American Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply (OPA) in Washington. He was later involved in the work at Bretton Woods, playing an especially critical role in devising a strategy that would be agreeable to both America and Britain, rising through the federal civil service to become Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department of Finance in the post-war years.

purposes.<sup>9</sup> Such policies would also increase both the relative and the actual power of government spending, so that the government would operate as "the sole economic incentive" directing the expansion of output. Because consumers might try to protect their standard of living by devoting more of their income to consumption, it would be necessary to restrict consumption through savings programs that would "siphon off the increase of purchasing power" and "immobilize money" during a period when wages were rising.<sup>10</sup> Income would be prevented from reaching the consumer, who was "thus entirely delivered from the temptation of spending."<sup>11</sup>

Over the course of the war, Canadians bought \$12.5 billion worth of Victory Bonds (approximately \$550 per capita) at a time when the average annual salary stood at around \$1,500. This achievement suggests not only the sacrifices Canadians were willing to make, but also that many Canadian families had income in excess of that required to meet basic needs.<sup>12</sup> While the savings campaign did not produce as substantial a volume of funds as had been hoped, it was regarded as critical in keeping down civilian expenditures. The object of the Victory Bond campaigns, explained R. B. Bryce, a committed Keynesian and the government's specialist in wartime finance, was not simply

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> Plumptre, *Mobilizing for War*, p. xviii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>12</sup> Canadian historian Jeff Keshen has characterized the pressure to buy bonds as "intense." Volunteers came to companies to deliver speeches prepared by the National War Finance committee or the Wartime Information Board, after which sign-up papers were passed around among employees. Many work sites posted lists of those who had purchased bonds or participated in payroll deduction schemes. One woman, who was earning only \$55.60 monthly as a Grade 1 clerk for the federal government—where most departments reported at least a 90 percent participation rate in payroll deduction schemes—recalled, "When a ...drive was on, we were given to understand that we were to buy and if we did not...we were brought into the chief's office [who] mentioned love of country, duty...and...the error of trying to hold out." Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 32.

to borrow idle funds which would not otherwise have been spent, but to borrow "in such a way as will most effectively reduce private consumption."<sup>13</sup>

Smaller amounts of disposable income were targeted by War Stamp campaigns that urged Canadians, particularly women and children, to practice restraint with dramatic slogans designed to discourage consumer purchasing. In one advertisement, Hitler was pictured whispering into the ear of a woman reaching into her handbag to pull out a five dollar bill, "GO ON SPEND IT . . . What's the Difference?"<sup>14</sup> The rhetoric of these campaigns often urged Canadians to think of their contributions as redirected spending rather than savings. The purchase of war stamps, for example, was equated with the purchase of armaments: every quarter bought a magazine of bullets for an army rifle; sixteen stamps bought a war savings certificate and a few certificates would buy the rifle itself; a few more certificates would help to buy a machine gun, a gun carrier or a field gun.<sup>15</sup> By reconsidering every purchase and buying war stamps instead of personal goods those at home were able to participate in the war effort, in effect "Loading a rifle by licking a stamp."<sup>16</sup>

In the later years of the war, the purchase of bonds was presented as deferred personal spending. In one advertisement a soldier explained to readers that he bought bonds because it would help "to smash the Jerries," and because "I figure on buying a house when I come home, and the wife and boy will need lots of things that they have

<sup>13</sup> R. B. Bryce in A. R. M. Lower and J. F. Parkinson (ed), *War and Reconstruction, Some Canadian Issues, Addressed given at the Canadian Institute on Public Affairs, August 1942* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Maclean's*, July 1, 1942, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> M. J. Lennon, *On the Homefront* (Erin: Boston Mills Press, 1981), p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

been going without since I've been away."<sup>17</sup> Victory Bonds provide "a nest egg for your future" another slogan promised.<sup>18</sup> Distinctions between thrift, spending and savings were eroded in the effort to redirect consumer dollars towards the war effort.

In addition to savings programs designed to "drain away" or "immobilize" the increasing volume of civilian purchasing power, Canadians were confronted with dramatic increases in taxes.<sup>19</sup> Sales taxes were broadened, personal tax rates were raised and exemptions levels reduced to reach incomes at the lower end of the scale. A national defense tax was levied and deducted at source, before reaching consumers.<sup>20</sup> Consumption taxes were introduced to conserve resources needed for the war effort. A steeply graduated tax, for example, was introduced on automobiles with multiple objectives: high taxes on luxury vehicles would conserve scarce American dollars by discouraging and penalizing purchasers; lower taxes on affordable vehicles would collect revenue while still moderating consumption, freeing up labour and equipment for the war effort as well as a certain amount of foreign exchange.<sup>21</sup> As the war continued these taxes, together with shortages and production restrictions, had the effect of altering the quality of consumption. The result, Plumptre observed in the language of economics, was that consumers were forced to spend their incomes in ways that would yield "less satisfaction."<sup>22</sup> In the post war period, forced savings would be available as a stimulus to

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<sup>17</sup> *The Toronto Star*, Saturday November 4, 1944.

<sup>18</sup> *The Toronto Star*, Saturday October 14, 1944.

<sup>19</sup> Plumptre, *Mobilizing for War*, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> Increases in personal and defense taxes were accompanied by assurances that annual incomes would not be reduced below \$1,200 for married workers or \$800 for single workers with an extra allowance for dependent children, in effect legitimizing the concept of a basic minimum income. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>22</sup> Plumptre, *Mobilizing for War*, p. 108.



recovery.

Fiscal programs were intended to work hand-in-hand with price controls. At the beginning of the war, price controls had been considered a protective mechanism government could use to supervise supplies of the "necessaries of life," ensuring that Canadian workers were not victimized by hoarding or price gouging. Established in September of 1939 under the Department of Labour, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board met shortages with temporary measures designed in part to reassure the public that hoarding (described as "speculative purchasing") was unjustified.<sup>23</sup> In August of 1941 responsibility for price control was transferred to the Minister of Finance and extended to include all goods and services. After consideration of various systems of price control, the government adopted a universal freeze, fixing the price of each good and designated service at the highest level at which that good or service had been sold in the four week "basic period" of September 15 to October 11, 1941. The effect of the ceiling was to freeze the prevailing price structure of each individual seller. Henceforth, cost increases were to be absorbed in the production and distribution chain before reaching the consumer.<sup>24</sup>

Canada's universal freeze was the most severe programme to be implemented by any of the allied nations during the war. The universal freeze was regarded as simple, fair, speedy and administratively effective; however, its objectives were considerably more ambitious than merely controlling inflationary pressures and demands for wage

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<sup>23</sup> J. F. Parkinson (ed), *Canadian War Economics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1941), p. 6; Keshen, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> R. B. Bryce, "Prices, Wages and the Ceiling," in David Slater, *War, Finance and Reconstruction: The Role of Canada's Department of Finance 1939-1946* (Ottawa: 1995), p. 127.

increases.<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Taylor, a professor of Political Economy at McMaster University before his appointment as the secretary of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, explained that the intent behind the program was to deprive the economy of changes in prices which brought about shifts in the allocation of resources.<sup>26</sup> Taylor stressed that manipulation of the price system was not to be regarded as a tool to achieve social justice. "The primary function of the price system was to allocate resources and to guide production. If you mix up price control with social justice you are apt to get neither."<sup>27</sup> The price ceiling, together with wage and salary controls, would not reflect improvements in productivity or changes in demand, but rather would preserve the status quo. Moreover, without price changes to "signal and induce" increases in supply, production changes would occur primarily at the behest of the government.

It was understood that, given the size and complexity of the Canadian economy and the democratic nature of Canadian society, extensive controls would require a huge bureaucracy and dictatorial tactics unless significant efforts were made to moderate demand and encourage voluntary compliance.<sup>28</sup> With this end in mind, Taylor explained

the illusion that the price ceiling was an end in itself may appear to exist from a superficial reading of some of the publicity that launched and sustained the program...it must be recalled that this was a highly novel departure, and that its success depended overwhelmingly on voluntary

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<sup>25</sup> Writing in 1947, Taylor described Canadian wartime price controls as "a pioneering venture that received considerable interest at home and abroad" and "a novel experiment." Bryce has similarly described the programme as "the most daring and successful economic decision of the war." Slater, p. 127

<sup>26</sup> K. W. Taylor, "Canadian War-Time Price Controls, 1941-6," in Parkinson, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Slater noted that voluntarism was the preferred approach to all aspects of the war effort, including, as much as possible, enlistment in the armed forces, savings and borrowing, the tax collection system and the allocation of manpower. The patriotic emphasis on voluntary as opposed to dictatorial methods was considered one of the characteristics that distinguished the allies from the enemy. p. 152.

compliance. . . . A sort of mass enthusiasm had to be built up. There was a good deal of extravagance and not infrequently a conspicuous lack of qualifying phrases in the argument. But it was a pardonable almost a necessary aspect of speedy mass education, that the price ceiling should be 'sold' to the Canadian public as an end in itself.<sup>29</sup>

Administering this growing array of economic regulations required a large bureaucracy.

The Wartime Prices and Trade Board developed into one of the most prominent wartime agencies with over one hundred offices across Canada and a staff of some six thousand at its peak, including many of Canada's academic economists.<sup>30</sup> Critical both to the enforcement of regulations and to the co-option of public support was an extensive network of volunteers. Immediate after the declaration of war, women's clubs across Canada mobilized the home front, organizing committees to report incidents of unauthorized price increases and profiteering and to monitor the availability of essential goods. These initiatives in turn led to the creation of the Consumer Branch of the WPTB under the directorship of Byrne Hope Saunders, editor of *Chatelaine*, Canada's principal women's magazine. The task of the Consumer Branch was to coordinate the voluntary activities of this vast network of self-developed committees with the needs of the federal government. American consumer organizations rose to prominence with progressivism. Canada's emerged in the context of wartime price controls, offering support to government programs of price control and product conservation, and encouraging

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Keshen, p. 72. Taylor outlines some of the prioritization and production directives, raw material allocation mechanisms, distribution controls and selective service regulations. See Taylor, pp. 87-94. Sheila Stewart, "Statutes, Orders, and Official Statements Relating to Canadian War-Time Economic Controls," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 13, No. 1, February 1947 provides an extensive listing of the principal federal statutes and regulations that emerged under emergency needs of wartime economy. Christopher Waddell offers a comprehensive examination of the activities of the WBTP. C. Waddell, "The Wartime Prices and Trade Board: Price Control in Canada in World War II, Ph.D. Thesis, York University, 1981.

consumer restraint.<sup>31</sup> While principally middle class in origin, at its height the network of consumers involved one million of Canada's three million adult women keeping close watch on prices across the country.<sup>32</sup>

The Consumer's Branch, together with Canadian War Time Information Board and the Canadian media, produced a steady stream of propaganda promoting the policies of restraint and appealing for understanding and compliance.<sup>33</sup> Dire consequences were predicted if WPTB rules were ignored.<sup>34</sup> Polls were commissioned regularly by the Wartime Information Board to determine the response of Canadians to wartime conditions. Polls which revealed a lack of support for particular programmes led, not to changes in policy, but to the launch of publicity campaigns.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as public opinion

<sup>31</sup> Lillian Millar, "Has This Structure of a Million Women Post-War Potentialities?" *Saturday Night*, July 8, 1944, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* See also Ruth Roach Pierson, *They're Still Women After All* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), pp. 39-40. British historian Matthew Hilton suggests that a middle class orientation and pervasive membership of similar organizations in Great Britain helped to diffuse consumer radicalism in that country during the war. Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 139-141.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Lillian Millar, "Price Control Depends Largely on Women," *Saturday Night*, October 10, 1942, p. 20. The heading to the story noted, "This article is designed to inform the women of Canada—on whose loyal support its success very largely depends—on the whys and wherefores of price control." In a flourish of militaristic rhetoric, the opening paragraphs announced "You women are a much more important factor than you realize in Canada's fight to control inflation. You belong to a vast army three million strong—homemakers and business women—and to you the government entrusted the task of seeing that price control works. The future security of your family depends upon how you carry out this duty."

<sup>34</sup> In one example a runaway train symbolizing inflation rushed headlong toward a cliff, while a spur track labeled 'price controls' lead the locomotive back to safety. Keshen, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> WPTB chairman Donald Gordon was convinced that if Canadians believed that price control and rationing worked, much of the Board's enforcement effort would become redundant and unnecessary. Waddell, pp. 548, 611. On war time polling also see Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy, Polling, Market Research and Public Life, 1930-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), Chapter Four: Mobilizing



polls indicated solid support for the price ceiling through most of the war, "the education of Mr. John Public," as head of WPTB Donald Gordon put it, was regarded as successful.<sup>36</sup>

While women's role in defense work and industry has often been emphasized in accounts of the home front sacrifices, the war effort directed public attention to the everyday labour women perform as housewives and mothers.<sup>37</sup> The economical use of resources, once associated with the moral virtue of thrift, was recast as patriotic sacrifice and became another way to win the war. As "Canada's Housoldiers,"<sup>38</sup> women contributed to the war effort thorough patriotic consumption that included conservation, compliance with rationing, planting victory gardens, recycling of scrap materials, raising monies for soldier's parcels, making clothing for the Red Cross and redirecting savings towards the purchase of war stamps and savings certificates. Patriotism was made practical in the women's pages of daily papers and magazines and publications such as "Eat it up, Wear it out, Make it do," and "The miracle of making old things new, a remake review."<sup>39</sup> Although these campaigns can be seen to have reinforced gender stereotypes, they also generated new political significance for tasks that had been viewed

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Popular Consent: The Surveyed Homefront, pp. 38, 65, 94-125.

<sup>36</sup> Keshen, p. 73. In December 1941, seventy-five per cent endorsed the price freeze. While public approval declined as the war continued, even after the war ended in 1945 polls were taken that revealed support retention of price controls for a period to prevent inflation and allow the diversion of needed supplies to Europe.

<sup>37</sup> Pierson, pp. 33, 41; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> Pierson, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, p. 87, Lennon, p. 38, Pierson, p. 244. The latter example is a forty-eight page booklet prepared with contributions by the pattern companies, indicating the degree to which business and government shared an interest in cultivating appropriate consumer behaviours during the war. *The miracle of making old things new, a remake review* (Ottawa: Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 1943).

as private and domestic.<sup>40</sup> The war saw an unprecedented extension of state intervention in the economy and in the private consumption choices of Canadians. At the same time, the emergence of this extensive network of volunteers monitoring the market as well as their own consumption practices in the home, served to enroll ordinary citizens in the apparatus of the state. At least for the duration, good citizenship and good consumership were regarded as inseparable.

The price freeze was supported by interventions on the production side of the consumer goods equation.<sup>41</sup> Production cuts, some mandated by the government, others introduced by manufacturers retooling for the war effort, saw the production of nonessential goods plummet. Simplification and standardization were ordered to keep costs down, minimize the use of scarce materials, and maximize the productivity of labour. In spite of these reductions, consumer spending increased throughout the war years.<sup>42</sup> Purchases from retail stores increased over eighty-two per cent during the course

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<sup>40</sup> Cohen, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> The real compulsion to save, it was noted, would "come through the greater difficulty that will be encountered in spending one's money usefully and effectively. As more and more goods become scarce, as one finds it more and more difficult to get the things he or she wants, then the public will be forced into saving because there is no other alternative. We should recognize this situation for what it is and not attempt to blow . . . our money on extravagant and useless expenditures. Rather, we should hold on to it until after the war when the resources of the nation can be devoted to satisfying the needs of the consumer rather than the needs of war. In this way our financial policies, public and personal, can be brought into accord with the underlying realities." R. B. Bryce in A. R. M. Lower and J. F. Parkinson (ed), *War and Reconstruction, Some Canadian Issues, Addressed given at the Canadian Institute on Public Affairs, August 1942* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942), p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Compliance hardly universal or without grumbling. A recent study by Canadian historian Jeff Keshen explores the black market that emerged during the war, linking the "less inspiring" side of the war effort, not to desperation, but to the expansion of purchasing power in the absence of readily available goods. Joy Parr, on the other hand, insists that "there was no wartime spending splurge," pointing out that spending on consumer durables, as a proportion of disposable income, declined by two-thirds. Both

of the war, from \$2.5 billion in 1939 to \$4.1 billion in 1944, due mainly to increases in the quantity of consumption as price movements were restricted for most of this period.<sup>43</sup> Over the course of the war restaurant business tripled; jewelry, women's clothing, shoe, and drugstore sales doubled; and paid admission in movie theatres leapt from 138 million in 1939 to 208 million in 1944.<sup>44</sup>

While government advertising urged thrift, manufacturers insisted that spending could be patriotic. Whenever possible, advertisements associated products with patriotism. Car owners, for example, were assured that the purchase of Mobiloil, Champion Spark Plugs and Sealed Power Piston Rings would bring victory closer by extending engine life and saving oil and gasoline.<sup>45</sup> Companies unable to provide consumers with goods such as General Motors and General Steel Wares emphasized their contribution to the war effort and encouraged North Americans to dream of a world when the discoveries of war would be "devoted to the more pleasant task of making the home

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interpretations can be true: while durable goods were unavailable, non-durable consumer goods were and, as incomes rose, Canadians spent. Keshen, Chapter four. Parr, *Domestic Goods*, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Canada 1946*, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa, 1946, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> It was during the war years that the University of Toronto began to publish studies on the marketing practice. The series, prepared in conjunction with the addition of marketing as an independent subject of study at the University, was concerned primarily with the marketing of consumers' goods and discussed topics such as retail merchandising, installment selling, marketing research, and the importance of goodwill, virtually without reference to the war. It was during this period, that Harold Innis, now head of the Department of Political Economy at University of Toronto, began to study the social history of communication, the nature of media as commodity, and especially the dominant role of advertising in the development of the modern newspaper. Problems of marketing, Innis commented, had far reaching ramifications, affecting not only the advertising policies of large organizations but also control of the media, political practice, and, ultimately, the possibility of democracy. *Ibid.*, p. xviii. H. R. Kemp (ed), *Canadian Marketing Problems* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939) and J. McKee (ed.), *Marketing Organization and Technique* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1940). See Innis in McKee, p. xvii.

<sup>45</sup> *Maclean's Magazine*, April 1, 1943, Lennon, p. 47.

more livable and more beautiful."<sup>46</sup> As victory approached, advertising shifted from wartime to post-war thinking. In the early years of the war, for example, the Parker Pen Company urged Canadians to "take up your pen for victory" and buy bonds; later ads linked the Parker Pen with "the men who are planning the world of tomorrow."<sup>47</sup> With regular weekly deposits, one mortgage company promised, "you'll be sure to have a good sized sum of money laid by to remodel your house, after the war."<sup>48</sup>

American historian Lizabeth Cohen has argued that the presence of "prosperity amid sacrifice"<sup>49</sup> kept the consumer ideal alive in the United States during the war. Many Americans lived better during these years than they had during the depression, creating a reasonable expectation for expanded post-war consumption. At the same time, a distinction emerged between the citizen consumer, whose patterns of consumption reflected the obligations of citizenship that required careful choices and restraint, and the private consumer, whose urges and desires continued to be cultivated by business. The tensions created by different understandings of consumption during the war were potentially resolvable as the end of the war neared and consumer spending became once again linked with economic growth.

Although Canada experienced similar tensions, her most prominent thinkers and policy-makers would seek different resolutions. In Canada, as in the United States, wage earners, especially those who were formerly unemployed or forced to work part-time, saw their incomes increase. Working class families enjoyed "a standard of living higher

<sup>46</sup> Dominion Oilcloth and Linoleum Ad, *Maclean's Magazine*, April 15, 1943, inside front cover.

<sup>47</sup> *Maclean's Magazine*, November 1, 1942, p. 6, and May 15, 1945, inside front cover.

<sup>48</sup> Huron and Erie Mortgage Corporation, *Toronto Star*, October 30, 1944, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Cohen, p. 69.



than for many years past, higher not only in quarts of milk and pounds of beef but also in peace of mind and in freedom to work and play as they will."<sup>50</sup> Total personal disposable income rose from \$4,207 million in 1939 to \$8,354 in 1945.<sup>51</sup> Debt repayments increased, as did savings. One account noted that ninety to ninety-five per cent of workers at a Toronto plant owned bonds; the average amount held was \$100. The Bank of Canada reported that while larger accounts, particularly those between \$1000 and \$5000 had been reduced, (presumably as the owners invested in Victory Bonds), there had been a total increase of 246,000 personal savings accounts since before the war, entirely in new small-sized deposits.<sup>52</sup> In a similar vein, *Saturday Night* noted "encouraging" increases in home buying and health care spending as well as anecdotal increases in marriages and family unification and reductions in the divorce rate, attributing all trends to improvements in the cash resources of Canadians.

Through the war Canadians had been encouraged to think like consumers, even when faced with limited consumption opportunities. Wartime controls set new precedents for government intervention in the supply, distribution and consumption of domestic goods, establishing a legacy of government involvement in the private lives of Canadian consumers. Economists reluctant to recognize the role of aggregate consumer spending before the war were ready to acknowledge the power of consumers when policies were needed to limit rather than encourage spending. What this meant for the post-war era, however, was not clear.

<sup>50</sup> D. C. MacGregor, "Standard of Living and The War Effort," in Parkinson, p. 153.

<sup>51</sup> F. H. Leacy, (ed.), *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983), Series F76-90, Personal income and its disposition, 1926 to 1976.

<sup>52</sup> "How Are Canadians Using Their War Earning?" *Saturday Night*, June 26, 1943, p. 39.

## Reconstructing Canada

In December 1939, only a few months after the war had begun, cabinet struck a committee to plan for the demobilization of the armed forces. Because the problems of demobilization would need to be considered with reference to the total post war economic situation, the committee soon included representatives from agriculture, business, labour, and academia.<sup>53</sup> Under the chairmanship of Cyril James, McGill University principal and a former professor of finance and economic history, the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction initiated one of Canada's foremost efforts at national, social and economic planning.<sup>54</sup> While the work of the Advisory Committee

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<sup>53</sup> Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, *Report, September 24, 1943* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1944), p. 1. While the Committee on Reconstruction was the first official exercise in reconstruction, it was hardly alone in the field. "Reconstruction" was in the air," and additional committees were soon struck by the Senate, the House of Commons, and within the federal civil service. Provinces, cities, private organizations and individuals were all interested in the problems and possibilities that would emerge once the war was won. Politicians were equally inspired. Writing for *Maclean's* in the spring of 1943, Bruce Hutchinson noted that the "newest and the most fundamental fact in our current Canadian politics...is this: The politicians of all sorts have promised us permanent prosperity."<sup>53</sup> Commitments were being made "on a scale never seen before" that was "entirely new as far as the major political parties are concerned." Leonard Marsh, *Report on Social Security for Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. xiii. Bruce Hutchinson, "Pie in the sky," *Maclean's Magazine*, April 1, 1943. McInnis provides a good account of the range of reconstruction discussion, in which "it seemed as if everyone had a postwar program, scheme, or counterproposal to add to the mix." The debate, he suggests, revolved around the degree of state involvement in the post-war economy. Peter McInnis, "Planning Prosperity: Canadians Debate Postwar Reconstruction," in Greg Donaghy (ed), *Uncertain Horizons, Canadians and Their World in 1945* (Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1997). For a discussion of reconstruction debates within the civil service, see Owsram, *The Government Generation*, pp. 292-306.

<sup>54</sup> The reports published by this committee have, in general, received less attention from historians than other post-war planning documents, largely due to rivalries between the so-called outsiders invited to investigate the issues and those working within government. Insofar as committee members were representative of the Canadian establishment, its work remains an important source of information on the mindset of postwar planning. On the rivalry between the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction and the civil service see

represented only one voice in the discussion, the investigations it conducted, the numerous studies it commissioned, and the speeches given by members helped to set the agenda that would guide post-war planning. Presenting its final recommendations after two and a half years of investigation and study, the Committee linked the future growth of the Canadian economy to expanding markets, both at home and abroad, while rejecting the immediate post-war period "as a time for comprehensive social and political revolution."<sup>55</sup>

The Committee adopted a fundamentally Keynesian approach in its commitment to employment and in its understanding that spending rather than savings was the basis of a strong economy.<sup>56</sup> While the overriding concern was job creation, recommendations for growth were tempered by fear of inflation and the belief that the Canadian economy was export dependent. While employment programs and social security were vital to the transition from war to peace, the domestic market was regarded as insufficient to sustain national prosperity. Canadians could not consume all of the commodities that the nation was best at producing. Increased domestic consumption fuelled by war savings would bolster the economy; however, large volumes of liquid assets in the form of bank deposits

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J. L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 161-163; and Owram, pp. 283-286. Also of interest is Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "'Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten': the Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, Vol., XV, 29 (May, 1982).

<sup>55</sup> Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, *Report*, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> In a footnote that highlighted these changes in economic thinking, the *Report* described capital formation not only in traditional terms as a process whereby machinery and equipment were purchased with a view toward using them in the production of goods for consumption, but also as a process that "decreases the supply of goods and services available for immediate consumption." Because aggregate capital formation represented goods and services "withdrawn" from current income, they reduced the flow of money, potentially reducing, rather than adding to the prosperity of the nation. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

and war savings were regarded as a latent inflationary factor which, given the unavailability of goods and services, would require government intervention if a classic boom-bust post-war scenario was to be avoided.<sup>57</sup>

Strong domestic demand and the availability of funds to spend were seen as preconditions for a strong post-war economy, but were not sufficient to guarantee a smooth transition. Careful planning would be needed to match production with demand if "chaos" was to be averted.<sup>58</sup> Price and wage controls could be carried forward to prevent inflation and temper the spending power of wartime savings. If inflation was kept under control, the committee members believed that there would be sufficient domestic demand to sustain the economy for one to two years following the conclusion of the war. After that, with savings exhausted and pent-up demand satisfied, future prosperity would depend upon the creation of long-range programs for the maintenance of a high level of consumer income, the provision of adequate employment opportunities, and the restoration of foreign trade.<sup>59</sup>

As head of the Committee, James spoke extensively on the need to create an open world economy in which international trade would be the basis of rising standards of living. Canada's prosperity, he insisted, "depends and will always depend upon world prosperity, and the extent of foreign markets for Canadian goods is dependent upon the extent to which Canadian are willing to take the securities, services and commodities that are offered by foreign countries."<sup>60</sup> The key to success was not self-sufficiency but

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<sup>57</sup> Slater, pp. 274-276.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 36.

<sup>60</sup> Cyril James, "The Foundations of Prosperity after the War," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 234, Agenda for Peace (July 1944), and



constructive economic cooperation, monetary stabilization and tariff reduction. The "desire for other people's goods," James insisted, was fundamental to the revival of world trade and the future of world peace.

In the immediate post war period, finding jobs for returning veterans and Canadians let go by wartime industries was critical. Steady employment was needed to secure income for Canadian workers and their families, and to help stabilize the economy as the war effort wound down. The committee believed that Canadian businesses would spend on equipment and create jobs if convinced that sufficient markets existed for goods. Canadians would spend their savings more prudently if they believed they had job security. Steady employment would create consumer confidence and help to stabilize both the industrial and the domestic sectors.<sup>61</sup>

The need for a smooth transition and fear of a return to pre-war depression conditions meant that job creation would be the measure of success of post war planning. Security rather than affluence was paramount. The limit to aspiration was the memory of the Great Depression, which remained the "reference point" for post-war thinking.<sup>62</sup> Every government program, including social insurance measures and public works had to be justified by its economic merits as well as its social benefits.<sup>63</sup>

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Cyril James, "Canada in the Markets of Tomorrow: A Series of Lectures Delivered at McGill University, Montreal, October 12, 1943-December 20, 1943 (Montreal: McGill Monograph Series, No. 2, School of Commerce, 1944).

<sup>61</sup> O'wram, p. 300.

<sup>62</sup> Parr, p. 31. John Deutch similarly described post-war policy making as "all geared up for an assault on the problems of the Great Depression." In S. F. Kaliski (ed.), *Canadian Economic Policy Since the War: A series of six public lectures in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the 'White Paper' on Employment and Income of 1945, November 1965*, (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1965), p. 128. W. A. Mackintosh offered similar recollections. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Report, p. 39. The emphasis on job creation was pervasive. Social security was

The Committee's understanding of the potential of domestic consumption to sustain the economy was constrained by its understanding of the limits of the Canadian economy and it gave voice to the dual and somewhat contradictory focus that would guide reconstruction planning. An inconsistency emerged that saw consumer spending as an important component of the economy while at the same time insisting that wages must be moderate if exports were to remain competitive.

### **Report on Social Security for Canada**

The most prominent of the special studies commissioned by the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction was the *Report on Social Security for Canada*, prepared by Leonard Marsh. Mandated to examine the possibilities and principles that might underlay the construction of a comprehensive social security system, the Marsh Report was consistent with the Advisory committee's overall approach in its insistence that social security was not merely or even primarily a welfare matter but rather should be

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described as involving "more than matters of welfare" during the transitional period, constituting "an important group of fiscal instruments that governments can use in their general economic strategy of recovery and stabilization." *Ibid.*, p. 33. Similarly, the Subcommittee on Conservation and Development of National Resources offered recommendations with "regard to the importance of these resources as national assets and emphasizing the part which the proposed policies may play in promoting employment opportunities at the end of the present war." The Subcommittee on Publicly-Financed Construction Projects proposed "to study the extent to which a carefully formulated program of construction projects may contribute to the national welfare of the Dominion of Canada as well as provide employment opportunities during the post-war period." The Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women also began by noting that "This report is predicated on the assumption that full employment will be the objective of all economic policy in Canada after the war." Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, Conservation and Development of Natural Resources, *Final Report of the Subcommittee* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1944), p. 3. Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, Publicly-Financed Construction Projects, *Final Report of the Subcommittee* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1944), p. 3. Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, Subcommittee on Post-War Problems of Women, *Final Report of the Subcommittee* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1943), p. 7.

considered a strategic factor in planning post-war economic policy. In the context of demobilization, Marsh emphasized, social welfare payments had the potential to provide "economic stability in the maintenance of the flow of purchasing-power at the time when munitions and other factories are closing down and war activity in many other spheres is being liquidated."<sup>64</sup>

Marsh differentiated between wages as an element in production—the result of negotiation between workers or their union and management—and wages as a precondition for consumption, that is, wages needed to maintain an appropriate standard of living.<sup>65</sup> Because the standard was defined on a "budgetary basis," the starting-point of all social security discussion would be the level of family income.<sup>66</sup> The *Report* did not concern itself with the provision of specific social facilities and services, although it noted that these were worthwhile, but with "covering, *through family income maintenance*. . . some of the most widespread contingencies."<sup>67</sup> Wage levels were described as the "critical determinant of well being" in modern society.<sup>68</sup> The basis of the system would be a social minimum. What this minimum should be remained "a matter for definition." Certainly, Marsh suggested, "it means the direct elimination of poverty."<sup>69</sup>

A number of alternatives were examined in the effort to find a scientific basis for a Canadian minimum. Readers were assured that such budgets were based on the

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<sup>64</sup> L. C. Marsh, *Report on Social Security for Canada* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1943), p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

knowledge of expert and experienced social workers familiar with the purchasing habits and requirements of low income families.<sup>70</sup> The final recommendations were devised "to set the line" at which families would have a "better than subsistence" quality of life with a reasonable promise of a minimum level of health and decency, providing there was "good management in the home."<sup>71</sup> This minimum was defined in terms of a series of specific purchases that included food, small charges for gas, coal, electric light, water, ice and cleaning materials, car-fare, and a small sum for the replacement of household equipment. Rentals allotments were determined from a sample study of actual houses meeting reasonable requirements of accommodation and repair. Allowances for advancement and recreation included newspapers, church and club contributions, and nominal pocket money for children, but did not include alcoholic beverages, tobacco or provision for vacations. With a set of objective standards and well established criteria, the social minimum would be comprehensive, purposeful and planned.

Government was expected to intervene in the economy to create jobs, using measures such as a simulative low interest rate policy to encourage industrial development, occupational training to upgrade employment skills, and the mobilization of public works projects as "part of the grand economic strategy of the post-war years."<sup>72</sup> Some families, especially those with children or those who had fallen prey to the

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<sup>70</sup> As described in the *Report on Social Security*, the logistics of household management required considerable expertise. Indeed it was the challenges of managing on the lowest incomes which required the greatest competence. Survival on an emergency subsistence budget, even for a short period, required "the most rigid economy, and skill in both purchasing and food preparation," and often depended on shopping techniques, nutritional knowledge and opportunities to buy in bulk that poorer families generally lacked. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



contingencies of life or the unpredictability of the modern employment, would require support if they were to attain a minimal level of goods and services. In such cases it would fall to the state to enable minimum levels of consumption through various supplements to income.

Response to the *Social Security Report* was predictably mixed.<sup>73</sup> While most Canadians were comfortable with the concept of expanded state responsibility for social welfare and employment, many objected to the specifics of the plan.<sup>74</sup> An analysis prepared by conservative social reformer Charlotte Whitton for the Conservative Party highlighted assumption underpinning the *Report* and the conflict between emerging traditional understandings of Canadian society.<sup>75</sup> Goals such as full employment, Whitton objected, assumed perhaps "unconsciously" a population of urban wage-earners although one-third of Canadians continued to be involved in primary production. Assuring every individual a social minimum "by supplement or substitution for earned income" was not only prohibitively expensive, it was fundamentally misguided. If the goal of social security was to raise the quality of life of all Canadians, cash payments to families would be less effective than strengthening social utilities.<sup>76</sup> Investment in hospitals, education, and recreational facilities would provide the services "requisite to good living standards"

<sup>73</sup> See Owsram, pp. 291-292 and Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, Third Edition (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1997), pp. 112-114.

<sup>74</sup> For examples of the conservative intellectual response see S. D. Clark, *Canadian Historical Review*, March 1944; and J. A. Corry, *Queen's Quarterly*, 1943. For examples of progressive responses see "Planning Post-War Canada," *Canadian Forum*, May, June, July and August 1943.

<sup>75</sup> See P. T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A feminist on the right* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1987), pp. 111-114, for a discussion of the philosophical and religious roots of Whitton's response. The authors propose a metaphysical basis for her recommendations in Anglican subsidiarism, which emphasized the subordination of self-interest to the community.

<sup>76</sup> Whitton, p. 23.

on the most economical basis. The government should not redistribute earned wealth because the ability to manage one's own income was an essential element of personal responsibility, but rather redistribute the costs of the risks associated with modern life through insurance programs.<sup>77</sup> Whitton acknowledged that there was "agreement among Canadians that no one within their citizenship should be suffered to exist at less than a decent level of life," but believed that this was not determined by "so many dollars and cents" per head, but by "a simple, decent, sound wholesome family life," with shelter, food, and clothing acquired by individual effort. Gainful occupation with continuity of work and remuneration sufficient to ensure reasonable self-support were preferable to programs of income maintenance. A decent social minimum was "something more far-reaching, vital and complex than the hope of a calculated amount of income in currency terms."<sup>78</sup>

Comparing Whitton and Marsh, different understandings of the socioeconomic order emerge: the one honouring individual effort, character and community; the other offering a baseline degree of social security and linking quality of life to quantity of income. While both interpretations reflect new concerns with a state role in improving life, the two plans also involved different methodologies of social practice. Whitton emphasized access to social utilities, the development of social infrastructure, and discretionary social assistance dependent upon the intervention of social workers. Marsh recommended a universal minimum income and employment security as rights of citizenship, but left spending to the discretion of the individual as a matter of administrative simplicity. In its approach as well as in its details, the *Social Security*

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

*Report* sketched out a way of life defined by a series of purchasing decisions. Even forms of consumption sponsored by the state would occur primarily within the privacy of the family unit. While Whitton rejected the exchange of money as a meaningful social bond, Marsh associated social welfare almost entirely with material rather than moral well-being. Whitton represented those Canadians who continued to be concerned about the moral and cultural consequences of a waged, consumption oriented society. Marsh voiced greater concern about economic inequality and proposed to make the accumulation of measurable quantities of external goods the responsibility of the state.

Response from within government itself was muted. The *Social Security Report*, presented by the Advisory Committee to a parliamentary committee, was never officially embraced. Mackenzie King pointedly ignored the entire project, preferring to emphasize his own reformist credentials and, whenever possible, to avoid controversy. Canada's principle historian of social welfare policy, Dennis Guest, suggests that politicians may not have understood the economic potential of the recommendations, but continued to see them solely in the context of social welfare policy.<sup>79</sup> It was widely acknowledged that the costs of a centralized comprehensive plan such as that laid out in the *Report on Social Security* were very high. If the economy slowed, the program might be too expensive to be undertaken. On the other hand, if employment levels and national income were maintained at wartime levels, social welfare would follow from prosperity and there would be little need for an extensive programme of social security. The result, one reporter suggested, was more interest in Ottawa in proposals that would stimulate the economy to ensure full employment than in those intended to secure the well-being of

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<sup>79</sup> Guest, p. 118.

Canadians as such.<sup>80</sup>

This trade-off, however, was premised on a distinction which neither Marsh nor the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction made. Both the *Report on Social Security* and the *Report of the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction* discussed social programs as measures of fiscal stability as well as social welfare. Indeed, to the extent that they emphasized the need for social welfare, it was to compensate for the risks associated with the forms of employment that characterized modern industrial society. Social welfare was firmly linked with economic policy.<sup>81</sup> Every Canadian family was simultaneously regarded as both a wage-earner and a wage spender, standing in a dual relationship to the economy, with the potential to contribute to national well-being through consumption as well as through production. At the same time, the role of the state was not to encourage consumption but to ensure adequate minimum levels of consumption. Policy recommendations did not emphasize the role of aggregate consumption to grow the economy, but did recognize the potential of domestic spending to stabilize the economy during a difficult time of transition.

#### **The White Paper On Employment and Income**

The largest increases in the Canadian economy during the war years had been in production and savings. In the closing months of the conflict, economic planning was dominated by the fear of short term inflation and long term stagnation. Capital investment continued to be regarded as the key to growth. The most optimistic view, "forcefully represented" by C. D. Howe, the minister heading the Department of War Services and future Minister of Reconstruction, was that the war had produced new economic

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in Guest, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> On this theme see Owsam, pp. 306-307 and Granatstein, p. 165.



opportunities, particularly in the areas of electronics, transportation and communication.<sup>82</sup>

The war had already reconstructed Canada's economy; all that was needed now was for reconversion to make the best uses of what existed.<sup>83</sup> Howe's positive views, however, were not widely shared. Few of Canada's economic experts believed that the domestic market could generate sufficient demand to call forth the capital investments needed to provide jobs, particularly the well-paying jobs needed to provide Canadians with high standards of living.<sup>84</sup>

Most shared the more pessimistic views of political economist D. C. MacGregor. MacGregor disputed that "what we can do in war (i.e. in creating and maintaining a boom) we can do in peace."<sup>85</sup> The wartime economy had been dominated by the demands of a single buyer purchasing enormous amounts of war goods, supplemented by the buying of other governments, some of whom had not bought from Canada in peacetime. Heavy borrowing and high taxes had supported the economy in a manner few Canadians would be willing to use continuously. Nor, he suggested, were abnormal and intense levels of demand, the absence of seasonal fluctuation, and the high levels of productivity sustainable over the long term. The war economy, MacGregor insisted, differed so much

<sup>82</sup> R. M. Campbell, *Grand Illusions: The Politics of the Keynesian Experience in Canada, 1945-1975* (Peterborough, Broadview Press, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> R. Bothwell and W. Kilbourn, *C. D. Howe* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1979), pp. 181, ff. R. Bothwell, I. Drummond and J. English, *Canada since 1945, Revised Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 46.

<sup>84</sup> In 1942 the Economic Advisory Committee created within the civil service responded to the proposals presented by the committee on reconstruction. Pointing out the need for reconstruction planning to be co-ordinate with demobilization, the committee asserted its own importance as the agency to co-ordinate programs and plans. Perhaps more expediency than planning, but a lot of same personnel.

<sup>85</sup> D. C. MacGregor, "The Project of Full Employment and Its Implications," in A. Brady and F. R. Scott (ed), *Canada After the War, Studies in Political, Social and Economic Policies for Post-War Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1944), pp. 191, 193.

from that of peace that any effort to perpetuate its merits would be exceedingly difficult.

Finally, McGregor emphasized Canada's dependency on decisions made in America and Great Britain. Income was critical to maintain modern standards of living, but Canada's economy, dependent upon trade for prosperity, remained vulnerable to outside conditions. Its key markets were unreliable and, in the post-war period, likely to be particularly so. As fellow economist W. A. Mackintosh noted in an exchange with the reporter Grant Dexter, "Every depression in this country has been the result of a fall in exports—volume or prices."<sup>86</sup> "The kind of world which will emerge after the war," he explained elsewhere, "will have more effect on Canada's destiny than any changes that are taking place within Canada during the war."<sup>87</sup>

The obvious problems of the period of transition were magnified by long term challenges associated with modernization. The war had intensified the patterns of industrialization, pulling Canadian workers from farms to cities. In the post war period the industrial structure would be in flux. Many old jobs—in agriculture, for example—no longer existed. It was possible that women could be convinced to return home, the elderly to retire, and the young to attend school, but the nation would still be left with thousands of returning soldiers and an expanded labour force of wage-earners. John Deutch, a young economist who joined the Bank of Canada during the war and would later chair the Economic Council of Canada, recalled that there was throughout the industrialized world a widely shared concern that stagnation "represented ...the 'normal' condition to which an advanced capitalistic economy would tend," and that the state of

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<sup>86</sup> Grant Dexter, *Ottawa at War: the Grant Dexter memoranda, 1939-1945* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Record Society, 1994), p. 499.

<sup>87</sup> Cited in Owram, p. 301. J. F. Parkinson makes virtually the same comment in his essay "Problems of International Economic Reconstruction," in Brady and Scott, p. 199.

full employment experienced during the wartime was anomalous.<sup>88</sup> The war boom was regarded, at least by many, not as evidence of the ability of the economy to grow, but of the power of the state to achieve set objectives. The policies devised to address these concerns were presented in the 1944 White Paper on Employment and Income and the Green Book, which outlined proposed federal social security programs for Dominion-Provincial Conference on Reconstruction. Both documents were informed by Keynesian thinking and directed to the overriding policy objective of "maintaining economic stability and high levels of employment."<sup>89</sup> In contrast with British, and particularly American applications of Keynesian thinking, the Canadian approach gave greater pre-eminence of place to exports, then to private investment, and only then to civilian consumption, a reflection of the structure of the traditional Canadian economy. This preoccupation with the nation's dependence on foreign trade was a major factor in the decision to substitute the goal of "high and stable level of employment" for the phrase "full employment" that had appeared in an earlier policy draft, offering a goal that was

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<sup>88</sup> Kaliski, pp. 123-124, 128. The main elements of the stagnation diagnosis were the slowing down of the rate of population growth, the slowing down of technological progress, and the expectation that, with growing levels of family income, consumer expenditures would, over time grow less than proportionately to the size of the economy with savings outrunning the demand for capital. In Canada the filling in of the west and the tendency to see private consumer behaviour as relatively rigid and therefore unlikely to fuel extensive economic growth, were additional factors.

<sup>89</sup> W. A. Mackintosh in Kaliski, pp. 14-15. Although reconstruction plans originated in different arenas, there was considerable overlap in key personnel. Leonard Marsh served as research advisor for the James Committee and authored the Report on Social Security for Canada. W. A. Mackintosh was an ex-officio member of the James Committee, later heading the subcommittee of the government's Economic Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, before assuming the role of Director General of Economic Research in the Department of Reconstruction and Supply where he became the principal author of the White Paper. Marsh has insisted that the Report on Social Security for Canada be placed in the context of similar proposals developed in Britain and the United States.<sup>89</sup> Mackintosh later described the White Paper as a consolidation of commonly held beliefs that was neither revolutionary nor "even novel" in its approach to post-war policy.

regarded as more realistic for an economy subject to fluctuations in international trade.<sup>90</sup>

The policies set out in the White Paper built on Keynesian reasoning, discussing the level of employment as a function of the national income.<sup>91</sup> The government's task was to ensure that the different elements of aggregate demand (export, private investment, consumer expenditures, and public investment) were as large as possible and as stable as possible. While in theory jobs were created whenever money was spent, exports and capital investment were regarded as critical to creating stable high-paying jobs, while incentives to increase consumer spending were tempered by the fear of post-war inflation. Similarly, large expenditure on public works, takeovers of private industry, and direct government control of the market was rejected in favour of inducements to the private sector.

Post-war planners, focused on the vulnerability and unpredictability of the Canadian economy, called upon the state "to take strong and deliberate action to maintain an adequate level of aggregate demand."<sup>92</sup> While it would not be accurate to say, as one observer did, that government planners entirely neglected the case for internal consumption, they emphasized the need for a program of investments (both private and public) and continued to regard exports as the key to prosperity and best prospect for generating employment.<sup>93</sup> In Canada the post-war years were instead a time of

<sup>90</sup> R. M. Campbell, *The Full Employment Objective in Canada, 1945-85, Historical, Conceptual and Comparative Perspectives* (Ottawa, Economic Council of Canada, 1991), pp. 2-3.

<sup>91</sup> Campbell, *Grand Illusions*, and Campbell, *The Full Employment Objective in Canada, 1945-85*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>92</sup> Kaliski, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup> Albert Rose, "Post-War Consumption Program," *Canadian Forum*, November 1944, p. 177. Ostensibly incentives directed toward the various components of aggregate demand were determined by economic merit. Parr argues, however, that these decisions



compromise rather than consensus.<sup>94</sup> Capital was offered improved market based stability, limited government intervention, low taxes and low interest rates. Labour was offered union recognition, rising incomes, employment security and social welfare programs. The goal was to create an environment of economic stability that would "reduce the hazards" for industry and for individuals.

Post-war plans did not emphasize, but neither did they ignore, domestic consumption. Family allowances, for example, were regarded not only as an aid to large families hurt by wage controls, but also as a means to "increase the buying power of those groups who not only need the money but who are most certain to use it immediately."<sup>95</sup> Legislation aimed at solving the post-war housing crisis held out the promise of increased consumer spending. Benefits such as war service gratuities and re-establishment credits intended to facilitate the reintegration of veterans to civilian life,

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embodied gender discriminations and moral judgments that privileged producers over consumer. Both Parr and Owsram argue that the perceived ability to manage the different aspects of the economy was also a critical factor. Exports were regarded as more difficult to control than domestic spending. Government, having successfully dictated market conditions during the war, believed that it had the tools to control consumers in the post war period. Although the political demand for consumer goods was considerable, planners argued that practices that had to be restricted to fight the war now needed to be restricted to limit inflation and maintain export competitiveness. Owsram, pp. 296-297 and Parr, pp. 65, 73.

<sup>94</sup> In comparison, Liz Cohen argues in *A Consumers' Republic* that consuming practices became increasingly hegemonic in America entering the post-war period when a fundamental consensus took shape that saw increasing mass consumption as the vehicle best able to grow the economy as a whole and also to facilitate increased individual freedom of choice. See also Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, *Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers' Collective Action in Canada, 1900-1948* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 273-301.

<sup>95</sup> On universality and the elimination of stigma see James Struthers, "Family Allowances, Old Age Security, and the Construction of Entitlement in the Canadian Welfare State" in Neary and Granatstein, pp. 183-184. Also see discussion in Owsram, *The Government Generation*, pp. 298, 300, 310-315 which locates the origins of post-war family allowance legislation in the Department of Finance rather than the social reform movement.

indicated the government's recognition of new consumer behaviours and a readiness to infuse some of the modest amount of cash available into the uncertain post war economy. Citizenship conferred certain consumer entitlements; but the government sought to direct this spending toward very specific purchases, such as a house and furnishings, children's goods, civilian clothing, and education that upheld traditional values of family, self-improvement, and practicality. Even when institutionalizing support for private consumption, the state discouraged hedonistic and self-indulgent spending. Good citizenship continued to be equated with self-control.

Post-war policies aimed not at equity but at economic stabilization.<sup>96</sup> The principle of universality was chosen not for reasons of social equity but for ease of administration. Rather than comprehensive social planning, Canadians saw a series of programmes advanced to create a stable environment for post war growth, adopted as much for their potential to build loyalty to the Liberal Party and the federal state as for their economic potential. While recognizing the consumer practices of daily life, economists doubted the ability of domestic consumption to sustain the economy. In the end the state moved to support consumption, but at the lowest levels rather than the highest.

Regardless of whether or not the government recognized the cumulative economic power of enforced savings, higher wages and full employment, Canadians were already

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<sup>96</sup> Campbell notes that the degree of economic redistribution anticipated from these policies was marginal. Many of the programs were self-financing or intended to be financed substantially by the maintenance of employment and income. Nor were they expected to increase the role of government in the economy. Very little in constitutional change was proposed. Post-war plans were intended to revitalize rather than change capitalism, facilitating and encouraging the expansion of private enterprise. Campbell, *The Full Employment Objective in Canada*, p. 4.

planning their post-war expenditures. A survey taken near the end of the war, for example, revealed that twenty-one percent of Canadians planned to purchase a car and twenty-two percent to buy a major appliance at the first opportunity.<sup>97</sup> Policies that dampened consumption during the war would magnify consumption in the post-war period.

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<sup>97</sup> Keshen, p. 116.

## 10. Buying Happiness

Post-war prosperity arrived slowly in Canada. Domestic consumption in the years immediately following the end of war continued to be shaped by government controls and shortages of goods. While the booming wartime economy had put cash in the pockets of Canadians, opportunities to purchase many household items, particularly durable goods, remained limited. Instead, Canadians were encouraged to examine their lives and do without. Magazines and newspapers continued to tout the benefits of reduced consumption and celebrate the innovative reuse of timeworn possessions as the government sought to steer a cautious course between depression (potentially caused by a slump in the economy as wartime industries closed down) and inflation (which might be induced by shortages).<sup>1</sup>

Despite the pessimistic predictions of government experts, however, there was no significant economic downturn. As the economy steadied, new consumption practices came to be seen as normal in both the descriptive and prescriptive senses of the term, that is, as both an object of knowledge and as a desirable goal.

The mass media articulated and publicized consumption oriented ideals through the positive presentation of examples and by offering advice regarding consumption practices. The social sciences had a similar role. Accepting the consuming family unit as fact, Canada's social scientists sought ways to stabilize the norm, exploring and devising policies that would bring deviations (whether for mental or economic reasons) more in line with society's expectations and objectives. In the field of culture, elites and scholars hoped that the cultivation of cultural appreciation and the application of critical reasoning

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 70.



would redirect Canadian consumers away from mass culture toward more appropriate choices.

Although expanding consumption practices were publicized and legitimized by the mass media and ratified by extended discussion in academia, positions of resistance and contestation emerged in the form of the refusal to participate fully in the marketplace and the insistent questioning of new values. Indeed even those who welcomed increasing choice continued to emphasize hard work, the risks inherent in the new economy of mass organization and the significant gap that remained between expectations and achievements. Paradoxically, many of the advocates of high culture adopted (or shared) the instrumental views of culture they so often condemned, seeing the solution to the problems of mass society in the consumption of the "right" kind of goods. The dynamic between the mass consumerism of everyday life and the consumption of approved-of high culture in approved-of ways remains critical in understanding Canadian culture as it emerged in the post-war period. Although differences between those who celebrated increasing materialism as social progress and those warning of impending societal decay remained largely unresolved, it became increasingly common to represent Canada as a consumer society. The morality of Canadian consumer society was advanced, contested and consolidated through public discussion as well as the creation of new institutions. To the extent that a dominant vision emerged, dissenting views were contained and carried forward within the structure of Canadian culture.

#### **Prelude to Consumer Society: The Post-war Transition**

As the economy gained strength in the immediate post-war years, consumption regulations were modified and gradually lifted. This did not, however, mean that the

government took an expansive attitude to spending. Programs introduced to ease the transition from wartime to peacetime were intended to stabilize rather than stimulate the economy. These often had the effect, over time, of magnifying class and gender gaps in Canadian society by strengthening the relative position of the steadily employed male breadwinner in post-war society and facilitate private rather than public spending in the domestic realm.<sup>2</sup>

Gendered relationships to consumerism and home-centered spending were also reinforced in representations of the workplace. To the extent that government specifically held out the promise of more goods in the immediate post-war period, the possibility of rising standards of living was usually linked to higher productivity and cooperation between business and labour. The message of teamwork and cooperation, used during the war to link patriotism to industrial production, was used after the war to promote the notion that capital and labour shared a common goal in the creation of prosperity.<sup>3</sup> A federal government poster prepared for the "Produce for Prosperity" campaign presented the case clearly, surrounding a large red dollar sign on the one side

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<sup>2</sup> American historian Lizabeth Cohen observed that the structure of the armed forces and the GI Bill favoured some over others, notably by offering benefits that women and blacks often had difficulty making use of. Post-war policies had much the same effect in Canada. Since men had constituted the majority of those serving, veterans' benefits tended to strengthen the primacy of the male breadwinner. Tuition credits made education more accessible to those for whom it was already possible without significantly expanding opportunities for working class men and women whose wages were required to support themselves and their families. Reductions in mortgage rates and equity requirements made homes more easily available to those who were steadily employed at good wages. Middle class families able to bank family allowance payments built-up savings for their children's future, increasing the gap between those who needed to spend all available resources to meet the exigencies of daily life and those able to accumulate a small pool of capital. *Consumers' Republic*, p.137 ff; Peter McNinnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation, Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 97, 122.

<sup>3</sup> McNinnis, pp. 129-134.

by images of household necessity labeled "everything we need," including a suburban bungalow, a shoe, a pot and a basic shirt; and on the other side by images of desire, labeled "everything we want," including a fur coat, a late model sedan, a radio and a refrigerator. Prosperity in the home would result from increased effort in the workplace and improved co-operation with management; domestic stability would follow from industrial stability.

While it recognized the importance of domestic purchasing as a way of life, the government continued to emphasize consumption as an incentive to increased effort in the workplace rather than as the key to economic growth. During the transition from wartime to peacetime the nation would continue to depend upon thrifty consumers able to stretch limited wages, and disciplined consumers willing to put desire on hold until Canadian industries could supply goods for the domestic market. High wage demands, it was explained, would make Canadian products uncompetitive. Strikes would disrupt the flow of goods.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to note that union campaigns used the same consumerist rhetoric to inspire workers to opposite ends. The promise of increased purchasing power, for example, was central to the Canadian Congress of Labour drive to organize Eaton's workers between 1948 and 1952.<sup>5</sup> Each working class family, the union argued, was entitled to a detached dwelling, household appliances, medical services, entertainments,

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<sup>4</sup> On these themes also see Parr, pp. 73, 77- 78.

<sup>5</sup> At the mid point of the twentieth century, the T. E. Eaton Company was Canada's largest department store and third largest employer. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the drive to unionize Eaton's was the most sustained attempt in Canadian history to organize retail workers. Donica Belisle, "Exploring Postwar Consumption: The Campaign to Unionize Eaton's in Toronto, 1948-1952," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 4, Dec. 2005.

and fashionable clothing and accessories.<sup>6</sup> Increased purchasing power for union members was not a retreat from politics, but a point of entry into civic life. As CCL Vice-President Pat Conroy declared to the Canadian Club the year prior to the Eaton's campaign, "Security is labour's chief objective. Our [democratic capitalist] system is capable of providing the material wealth necessary for happiness, and the worker wants to secure his share."<sup>7</sup> Union membership would secure material opportunities for workers and their families, enabling them to become full Canadian citizens.

### **Principles of Responsible Consumption**

The work-to-spend ethic encouraged by advertising was reinforced in different ways by government and labour. Both organizations sought to win consent by emphasizing opportunities in domestic consumption: the former linking the satisfaction of desire to increases in productivity, the latter to higher wages. In both cases messages directed at establishing the common goal of consumption tended to assign male breadwinners the responsibility of providing economic sustenance for wives and families. Women were relegated to allegedly passive roles as household consumers who would benefit indirectly as the spouses of working men, rather than directly as production workers.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time addresses prepared by women and aimed at women in their role as housewives continued to emphasize restraint and household management as the key to

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<sup>6</sup> Shopping practices were also put to use in the union cause. Union "shopping days" saw representatives carrying shopping bags and campaign buttons with pro-union slogans through the aisles of Eaton's stores. Union dances and bowling leagues suggested that union membership was compatible with mass culture as well as militancy. Union organizers emphasized that many employees were regular Eaton's customers. See Belisle, especially pp. 654-658.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Belisle, p. 671.

<sup>8</sup> Belisle, p. 670, McLinnis, p. 138.



familial and national happiness. In the immediate post-war context of economic and employment uncertainty, where the supply of domestic goods was outweighed by demand and employment remained uncertain, "know how" and "good buymanship" continued to be celebrated as housewife's "best allies" to offset the shrinking dollar and counter the prospect of inflation. In many ways the advice given, with its emphasis on making-do, was no different than that which had been offered in preceding decades of depression and war. However, the context had begun to change dramatically. While the depression had too many goods and not enough dollars, the immediate post-war years were troubled in the short term by too many dollars and not enough goods; and, in the long term, by the threat of economic instability if the spending splurge ended without creating permanent employment.

While business sought to stimulate demand, women's page experts called for prudence during a time of transition. A case in point is available in the writings of Canada's pre-eminent women's section columnist Lillian Millar. In numerous articles written for both *Saturday Night* and *Maclean's*, Millar urged women to do without, to question every expense and, when they did have to buy, to shop wisely. Insofar as "financial difficulties in the home inevitably bring demands for higher wages which in turn often result in strikes and labour unrest ... the peace and prosperity of the nation" were seen to hinge on "whether or not personal finances could be put on a sound financial basis."<sup>9</sup> Limiting demand would limit inflation; limiting inflation would limit class strife. Typically, women's page experts like Millar proposed three strategies for dealing with rising prices in the immediate post-war period: thrift, "know-how" and united action.

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<sup>9</sup> *Saturday Night*, October 5, 1946.

Needless buying was discouraged and prudence emphasized.<sup>10</sup> "With so much at stake, no one can afford to buy carelessly or thoughtlessly,"<sup>11</sup> admonished Millar. Even a high income was no guarantee of success: no matter how large the income might be, it would not buy everything one might need or desire. Instead, the "housewifely arts," "good buymanship" and successful budgeting would provide "peace of mind...a sense of security...[and] the thrill of satisfaction which achievement brings."<sup>12</sup> Success or failure in managing family finances depended upon "the amount of thought and effort which is given to make the dollars buy the most comfort and happiness."<sup>13</sup> Increased domestic effort would help ease the pressure of rising prices by making limited resources provide higher standards of living.

According to *Chatelaine*, Canada's leading women's magazine, efforts like these that were in essence ameliorative rather than radical were the preference of most Canadian women. When a survey of the members of *Chatelaine's* Consumer Council in October 1947 asked if they approved of buyers' strikes or the picketing of retail stores, sixty-two percent replied "No."<sup>14</sup> Most families, according to the survey, were able to deal with increased food prices by increases in income and the re-allocation of income

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<sup>10</sup> For examples see articles by Millar in *Saturday Night* October 5 1946, October 26 1946, March 29 1947, June 14, 1947, October 9, 1948 and in *Chatelaine*, March 1947. Millar also emphasized the importance of education and united effort, proposing that certain wartime programs should be re-instituted to meet the post-war "state of emergency." Homemakers' courses which had been offered to women in the services should be made widely available. New brides would benefit from technical training in the various phases of household management. "Remake Centers" established by the Consumer Branch of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board to assist women in restyling old clothing could be re-opened.

<sup>11</sup> *Saturday Night*, October 26, 1946.

<sup>12</sup> *Chatelaine*, March, 1947.

<sup>13</sup> *Chatelaine*, March, 1947.

<sup>14</sup> *Chatelaine*, October 1947.

and savings, including redirecting the money once invested in Victory Bonds and War Savings Certificates towards the food budget.<sup>15</sup>

The Canadian Association of Consumers expressed similar attitudes. The CAC was one of several organizations that sought to represent the interests Canadian women shared as consumers in the post-war period.<sup>16</sup> As a founding member of the new CAC explained, the war and its aftermath of problems had "awakened Canadian women to a new sense of their responsibilities and of their possibilities, both as homemakers and as citizens."<sup>17</sup> While the CAC was dissatisfied with certain aspects of consumer society, it remained committed to free enterprise and a free market, refusing "to be stampeded into emotional short term decisions" such as rolling back or freezing prices.<sup>18</sup> The CAC did not, for the most part, challenge the elimination of price and wage controls, but rather

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<sup>15</sup> Korinek notes that "a lasting tradition of anti-consumerism" lingered at *Chatelaine*, possibly the legacy of the magazine's commitments to helping women through the years of the Depression and its role as "a right-hand helper" in the rationing and conservation campaigns of the Second World War. Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 295.

<sup>16</sup> The CAC was not the only organization seeking to champion consumer interests in the later 1940s, and there was no unified approach among these different groups to consumer issues. While the CAC tended to align itself with government (and was the recipient of government funding), the more radical Housewives Consumer Association organized boycotts, buyers strikes and petitions to restore price ceilings. In spite of differences in strategy (the CAC emphasized spending habits the HCA focused on earning patterns), both organizations gendered the consumer as female. On the difficulties in organizing consumers as a public interest group see Parr, Chapter Four, "Consumer Sovereignty." On the early history of the CAC see Helen J. Dawson, "The Consumers Association of Canada, *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. VI, No. 1, March 1963. For examples of descriptions of the CAC as the association Canadian women see articles by Thelma Craig, "New Association of consumers to Be Voice of United Women," *Saturday Night*, November 1, 1947 and "The Voice of the Consumer to Be Heard Via Women's Organization," *Saturday Night*, 1947

<sup>17</sup> *Saturday Night*, November 1, 1947.

<sup>18</sup> *Food for Thought* (Toronto: The Canadian Association For Adult Education), Vol. 18, No. 3, December 1957, p. 112.

sought to position itself as a liaison between government and consumers, presenting the concerns and recommendations of homemakers to the appropriate government department or agency and working as an educational force in the development of enlightened public opinion.<sup>19</sup> Fulfilling this mandate, organizers claimed, would make the CAC "a great stabilizing and constructive influence in the practical workings of democracy."<sup>20</sup> Insofar as the CAC affirmed its belief that the current economic system had "contributed greatly to one of the highest standards of living in the world and ... provided the greatest measure of protection for consumers generally,"<sup>21</sup> the burden and responsibility for making ends meet would continue to fall on the individual family, and most especially the housewife, rather than on government or industry.

In the immediate post war years Canadians consumers faced what at first glance seemed to be contradictory or at the very least, inconsistent messages. Producers (frequently male) were urged to work to spend. Meanwhile Canadian consumers (generally addressed as female) were urged to practice restraint. With limited access to goods, decisions to spend faced practical as well as rhetorical constraints. Indeed Canadian historian Joy Parr argues that the purpose of messages of restraint was not so

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<sup>19</sup> However, different government departments advanced slightly different interpretations, within the context of support for orderly consumerism. While the deputy minister of Trade and Commerce told the audience at the first CAC conference that "the most potent force for the development of a desirable national project in this country is a unified demand from the ladies, who do most of the buying ...not to mention most of the voting," Graham Towers, Governor of the Bank of Canada, made it clear that he regarded the CAC as a continuation the Wartime Prices and Trade Board with a mission to moderate wage demands and expectations. Towers suggested several educational initiatives for the CAC to pursue, the foremost of which emphasized Canada's dependence on international trade, the importance of efficient production and competitive pricing in a world where success depended upon "being able to offer our customers goods at the going world price." *Saturday Night*, December, 1947.

<sup>20</sup> *Saturday Night*, November 1, 1947.

<sup>21</sup> *Food for Thought*, p. 112



much to change behaviour as to reconcile Canadians to shortages and delays in the availability of goods that had resulted from deliberate government policy.<sup>22</sup> Prudence, paired with promises of imminent prosperity, was increasingly seen as a short term solution to a temporary problem. As goods became available, the need to temper desire began to diminish although it did not disappear. By 1947 the immediate period of post-war crisis had begun to ease. Employment was up and total consumer expenditure was increasing, from \$14.1 billion in 1944 to \$17.3 billion in 1946 and \$18.5 billion in 1947.<sup>23</sup> Businesses were building new plants, replacing old machinery and working at full capacity. By 1947, unemployment, which had never risen to more than four per cent, had dropped to one and a half per cent. By the end of 1948 Canada had five million people in gainful employment, 700,000 more than the number of civilians employed at the peak of the war effort in 1943 and 1.3 million more than in 1939 at the end of the depression. Soon Donald Gordon, the former head of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, now the Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, would be able to boast that "[we] drank one third more milk, ate two thirds more pork, rang up two thirds more movie admissions and bought 75% more new houses in 1948 than in ... 1938.... We used twice as much gasoline, chewed twice as much gum, bought twice as many refrigerators and ate three times as much ice cream."<sup>24</sup> Regardless of modest role initially envisioned for the domestic consumer, consumption was on the rise and rising consumption numbers were increasingly regarded as a good thing.

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<sup>22</sup> Parr, pp. 89-90.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, John English, *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism*, Revised Edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 68-69.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in *Chatelaine*, January 1951.

### Models of Responsible Consumerism: From Thrift to Modest Spending

In the post-war era Canada's leading women's magazine, *Chatelaine*, offered a unique forum for the discussion and debate of modern living, marriage and motherhood.<sup>25</sup> Feminist oriented editors and writers received a considerable degree of leeway from the business department to challenge and even critique aspects of women's role in Canadian society as long as magazine sales remained strong. Readers--some intrigued, some in agreement, and some in anger--discussed the issues of the day in letters to the editors and over coffee with friends. With a monthly readership of almost two million from all regions of the country, *Chatelaine* addressed itself to a cross-section of the nation.

While *Chatelaine* was often regarded as something of national institution, it was also a mass produced consumer good with a "community of readers" created by the consumption of this good. Like other forms of mass media, *Chatelaine* helped to construct social knowledge, setting the terms of reference through which readers perceived their world. Media, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall has observed, classify the world within the discourses of the dominant ideology, prescribing an underlying unity that limits the range of discussion.<sup>26</sup>

From time to time feature stories in *Chatelaine* examined the spending patterns and lifestyles of young Canadian families, celebrating lives of modest consumption. A survey of *Chatelaine's* featured families reveals modest but steady increases in material prosperity, a gradual relaxation of stringent self-disciplines and an increasing encouragement to experiment, albeit in pre-approved ways, in an expanding world of

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<sup>25</sup> Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Hall, p. 341.

commercial possibilities. The exercise of freedom and choice was manifested in the selection and consumption of goods as well as in discussions of birth control, divorce and racism. By giving certain lifestyles tacit approval and instructing other Canadian families how to achieve similar results, the magazine helped to legitimize new patterns of spending and consumption and the partial reorganization of the family around the purchase of goods and services.

Canadian historian Valerie Korinek argues that the commercial imperatives of the publication, particularly the advertisements promoting household perfection through consumer spending, should be read separately from the feature articles, editorials and letters which, she contends, subversively complicated any simple recipe for affluent domesticity. However, the boundary between the world of goods and the world of feminist ideals was less firm than Korinek indicates.<sup>27</sup> In effect these stories offered both normative and prescriptive accounts of the Canadian family, publicizing families chosen to represent the norm and dispensing a range of advice (from recipes to budgeting techniques) designed to help other families bring their lives closer to this ideal. Two discourses ran in parallel through *Chatelaine*, with advisements that sought to stimulate spending set beside articles that taught how to achieve similar results on smaller budgets. The effect, which might have seemed ironic or paradoxical, was sincere. American historian Michael Schudson had termed advertising a form of "capitalist realism," proposing that advertising is an art form in which capitalism reaffirms its values.<sup>28</sup> In a similar way, these articles can be viewed as parables offering moral lessons that

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<sup>27</sup> See for example, p. 257.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

reconciled traditional values with new spending practices.

A closer examination of three of the magazine's lengthier feature stories (entitled respectively "Rich on \$40 a Week" (1949), "We Sent an Expert to Help This Family Make Both Ends Meet" (1954), and "101 Ways to Save Money--and look better, dress better, eat better and live better" (1962)) shows how new consumption patterns were simultaneously reflected in and authorized by the magazine. Each presented a family with young children understood as typical, but also worthy of emulation in its struggle to achieve the Canadian ideal. Stories like these were not only celebrations of prosperity and materialism, but also of home, family and security.

### **The Menzies**

The Menzies, featured in "Rich on \$40 a Week" (1949), demonstrated by the strength of their personal example how to live modestly with grace.<sup>29</sup> *Chatelaine's* 1949 "salute" to this family stressed that while anyone could economize grimly, there was "something special about young people like veteran Bill Menzie and his wife Marie, of Hamilton, who are buying their house, raising their children well, and doing it all with deep and satisfying happiness." While some readers might doubt that it was possible to run an attractive charming home on so little, *Chatelaine's* correspondent insisted that the Menzies proved it could be done and "told us how they do it." The vocabulary used to describe them emphasized their personal skills, self-sufficiency, thrift, self-discipline and strength of character—the traditional attributes of success in a producer economy.

The Menzies' income came from Bill's wages as a Bell Telephone lineman minus taxes, insurance and an at source deduction for company bonds. This amounted to \$143

<sup>29</sup> *Chatelaine*, February 1949, pp. 14-16, 26-27.



plus an \$11 family allowance cheque each month. This amount "was made to cover" the carrying charges on the home (a small house with an unfinished upstairs in a veteran's housing development), life insurance, coal, gas, lights, groceries, a \$10 monthly payment on a vacuum cleaner, and a few miscellaneous expenses such as the \$3 to a pediatrician, the daily paper, tobacco, and street car fare. Behind these "cold figures," *Chatelaine* assured readers, "lies a story of devotion and integrity; the story of two fine young people who have found real happiness for themselves by putting the welfare of their family ahead of their own pleasures."

There was no provision in the budget for clothing. Both Bill and Marie practiced personal thrift, in part because as children they had grown up on the prairies "when mere survival seemed an end in itself." Marie was part of a clothing exchange--whenever she received a garment she gave another away "so that her closet is not filled with dresses of dubious value that she seldom wears." Their son wore pajamas made by Marie from flour sacking but trimmed with colourful fabric. Similarly, father and son had matching sport shirts made from government surplus cloth. Marie had embroidered their initials on the pockets. Grocery shopping was limited to one trip a week to eliminate impulse purchases. The cost of meat was a concern but Marie had "clever ways" of stretching out the week-end roast ("but not day after day until the family is tired of it"). Marie's cooking skills were the subject of frequent compliments, and the article included her personal recipe for refrigerator rolls. Bill was finishing the upstairs of the house himself and the magazine informed readers that he had proven a very competent carpenter. For pleasure there was gardening, pot luck dinners, conversation with friends and occasional games of bridge. Marie rented out a room and provided breakfast to a boarder for two

weeks that year to earn the amount necessary to join a book club: \$15 a year paid "proudly" in advance. In a world that increasingly emphasized novelty, the Menzies slept beneath a framed hand-embroidery that read in part "Let me grow lovely growing old/ So many old things do...Why not I as well as they grow lovely growing old." *Chatelaine* concluded approvingly if somewhat cryptically that these words were the key to the philosophy the Menzies lived every day, "in which things had been passed up but never sacrificed."

Within the context of the magazine, the Menzies represented a "culture of character," epitomizing the qualities of self-control, mastery and hard work needed for success.<sup>30</sup> The Menzies' profile emphasized the traditional attributes of the producer family unit, modestly amended for a world of waged employment moving towards higher levels of consumption and a more rapid turn over of goods. Self-discipline and thrift remained key themes in a household that blended home-made and store-bought. Mention was made of new purchases, but more attention was given to Marie's abilities as an artist, seamstress and cook. Bill was commended for his carpentry skills as well as his contribution to the war effort and steady post-war employment.<sup>31</sup> Relationships (within the family and with neighbours) were regarded as more valuable than things, and

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<sup>30</sup> See American historian Warren Susman for a fuller discussion of the shift from a culture of character to a culture of personality, a difference which he regards as central to understanding the problem of the self in the changing social structure of modern society. See Warren Susman "'Personality' and Twentieth Century Culture" in *Culture as History*. The shifts in the fifteen year period examined here were less dramatic, but constituent with this transformation. The Menzies continued to represent traditional values of character and thrift and self-reliance in the context of expanding post-war opportunities, while the presentation of the Woods and the Roses shifts progressively towards the discussion of external appearance and likeability.

<sup>31</sup> The author of the article noted that Marie had encouraged Bill to take a job with Bell Telephone because it was a company of "standing" that offered opportunities for advancement and retirement benefits.

tradition as more important than novelty. Participation in the marketplace was selective although gradually increasing; however, the Menzies continued to express themselves by making and doing rather than through their purchases. With Bill's limited income stretched by Marie's creativity and his own carpentry skills, the home was presented as a centre of production rather than consumption.

However, the dynamics of family spending were beginning to change rapidly. In the immediate post-war period *Saturday Night* had described the balanced household budget as "the only sound foundation upon which a strong and peaceful nation [could] be built."<sup>32</sup> In 1951 *Chatelaine* discussed the family budget as "a marvelous bit of household equipment" that promised to help make "wishes come true."<sup>33</sup> Money management had become a "formula for better living," and the place to begin budgeting was no longer with income but with "wishes." It was the wish list which, far from being frivolous or dangerous, would provide the incentive to make budgeting work. The norm had shifted from living within one's means to the progressive enlargement of possessions and the articulation of desire.

### **The Woods Family**

With the economy growing and more goods available, with purchasing power on the rise and need for markets ever present, Canadians were becoming comfortable with their role as consumers. Changing expectations, however, were creating new problems. In 1954 the *Chatelaine* spotlight was focused on another "typical" Canadian family: Russell and Josephine (Russ and Joie) Woods who were "in trouble trying to make \$300 a month cover upkeep on two children, a new bungalow, a bigger car than they should

<sup>32</sup> *Saturday Night*, October 5, 1946.

<sup>33</sup> *Chatelaine*, March 1951.

have bought and a rash payment on a TV set."<sup>34</sup> In the course of five years *Chatelaine's* "typical" Canadian family had become less, rather than more competent, in the face of social changes. The Woods family was the subject of a series of three articles over the course of a year written by an expert budget advisor sent by *Chatelaine* to "help this family make both ends meet."<sup>35</sup> While the Menzies had been described as "special", the Woods were presented as "a family with a universal problem." Striving "to participate in Canada's climb toward a higher standard of living" they were unable to make their income fit their expenses. Young and inexperienced, overwhelmed by impulsive spending and bad budgeting decisions, the Woods family was having difficulty navigating the new world of consumer goods, installment buying and rising incomes. The author's assignment in "We Sent an Expert to Help" was to demonstrate in a "budget experiment with a real family... if all the precepts of smart buying and management can actually work out well in real life." By following the advice of an expert provided by the magazine, this family and *Chatelaine's* readers would learn how to budget, research and plan their purchases to obtain whatever they wanted most.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Chatelaine*, 1954.

<sup>35</sup> *Chatelaine*, January 1954, pp. 14-15, 49-51; September 1954, p. 23; December 1954, pp. 24, 42, 44, 46-47.

<sup>36</sup> The rise of the expert was not limited to the family budget. Mona Gleason examines the army of experts in these decades who helped to regulate behaviour by identifying patterns of normalcy and deviance. Labeling some behaviours as good and others as bad helped to generate "spontaneous" consent for socially desirable ideals. Doug Owsram similarly discusses the emergence of marriage experts offering, in addition to broad statements of values and ideas, advice on how to make modern marriage a success. Gleason and Owsram acknowledge that, while it is impossible to know if the recommendations of experts were followed, "such advice did transmit the conventions of the ages and the norms that people took as their yardsticks." High rates of literacy, access to the radio and later to the television, helped to disseminate a wide range of advice aimed at solving the social problems of rapid change and increasing affluence. Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada*



Russ Woods was a music teacher in the Windsor public system. After deductions for insurances, pension, taxes and Patriotic Fund, his take home pay was \$300 a month, which the article described as a fairly typical white-collar salary." Although both the Menzies and the Woods had mortgages on their homes and bought appliances on the installment plan, the Menzies had been presented as skilled in making-do and practiced in self-denial and self-discipline. By comparison, the Woods were portrayed as adrift in the world of consumer goods and easy credit, irresponsible in their money management and prone to impulsive purchases. When Russ, for example, had gone to test drive a small \$500 car, he returned with a \$1,400 Pontiac and a debt at 6% interest to the Teachers' Credit Union. A few years earlier Russ had "television fever" and bought a reconditioned set for \$25 down. The family had second thoughts about the purchase, but was unable to cancel the contract. The sales manager allowed them to apply the down payment towards a less expensive radio-phonograph that continued to occupy a corner of the living room although it was already broken. Joie was described as "a brave and expert practitioner of the penny-stretching arts," but the details of her homemaking efforts suggested limited skills. Her specialty dishes were nicknamed "conglomerations." The night before the interview, for example, she had served sausage meat creamed with corn meal. *Chatelaine* did not publish the recipe.

The expert brought in to help the family was Sid Margolius, the author of the best selling *How to Buy More For Your Money*.<sup>37</sup> He insisted that the young family start with

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(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) pp. 6-9. Owsram, pp. 21-22, 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Sid Margolius was only one of a number of authorities available to teach Canadians how to be more effective consumers. On Margolius also see Cross, pp. 147-148. Expert advice on a wide range of topics was one of *Chatelaine's* selling points. Consumer goods were always prominent. The magazine had been awarding its "Seal of Approval" for

accurate record keeping and a long range plan. The overall goal was to pay down debt and develop a cash reserve for replacements and repairs. Margolius described the budget as a muscle: the more it was used, the more effective it became. The problem the Woods faced was not insufficient income, but insufficient "muscle," experience and knowledge. The solution was not to stop spending but to research and plan purchases, taking advantage of sales, buying in bulk, and keeping installment payments to a minimum. The onus to control spending remained with the family, but it would be necessary for them to serve a period of apprenticeship in order to learn to manage their spending. The objective was not to increase savings beyond the creation of an emergency reserve fund but to accumulate material goods.

Although magazine readers had "saluted" the Menzies, they were described as "pulling for" the Woods and returned periodically to see how the family was making out.

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many years. The seal began to be featured more prominently both within the magazine and on product packaging in the late 1950s, certifying that these products had been tested by the *Chatelaine* Institute and found worthy. The prototype was the American magazine *Good Housekeeping*, which had begun in 1924 to test household products and issue a "Seal of Guarantee" to those items which met minimum standards. Insofar as consumers were seen in need guidance rather than protection, the Seal of Guarantee would safeguard shoppers from exploitation by unscrupulous manufactures, while at the same time promote a free market ethic. Similar seals offered by private associations became increasingly popular, although they were singled out in the 1960s by consumer advocates for links with advertiser and manufacturing associations. Hilton, pp. 172-173. Franca Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek, "Jell-o Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food," in Iacovetta and Korinek (ed). *Sisters or Strangers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.)

In post-war Canada, *Chatelaine* was not the only source of information available to Canadian consumers. By 1957 twenty to 25,000 copies of the American publication *Consumer Report* were being sold on Canadian newsstands each month, along with over 17,000 subscriptions. In 1962 the CAC added product testing to its mandate and began to publish results in its *Bulletin*. Effectively all of these efforts to align good consumer practices with the purchase of goods implied upward mobility in the progressive accumulation of more things, rather than with, for example non-material forms of acquisition. Korinek, p. 274; *Food For Thought*, 1957, pp. 120-121.

By September the family was one member larger after the birth of a second son and virtually debt free. The budgeting techniques had helped, but the family had also been able to significantly increase its income. Russ received a raise, and was also teaching at night school, tutoring students, and had found paying passengers to defray the costs of the commute to work. Rising incomes facilitated the reduction of debt and encouraged plans for future purchases.

A final report in December of 1954 revealed that Russ and Joie had "found new values, new purpose and a new security" through budgeting. Once "baffled," "frustrated," "impatient," and "unsure of themselves," they now had definite aims. "Before we knew what we wanted to do, now we know how to do it," explained Joie. As the family's purchasing agent, Joie was planning, in order, the following acquisitions: an electric floor polisher, a new rug for the living room and an electric clothes dryer. After making a thorough study of a particular field of merchandise, she would determine what type and model to buy.<sup>38</sup> Margolius characterized her as "an unusually expert shopper," one who believed "quite rightly... that home management requires as much skill and thought as business management." Although Russ's increased earnings had clearly helped turn the family budget from debt to surplus, the story emphasized the competence gained through planned spending rather than self-denial or increased income. While the association between profligate spending and the loss of self-control was softening, it was still the case that planning legitimized increased spending in a way that simple gains in income failed to do.

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<sup>38</sup> By the late fifties features explaining "how to budget" were being replaced by those explaining how to spend. "Should a dryer be your next appliance?" asked *Chatelaine* in April of 1959. Other articles examined the merits of different brands and styles of electric irons and flatware.



The stories of the Menzies and the Woods offer condensed versions of the transitions many Canadian families were experiencing. If the Menzies' life epitomized the material limitations of the immediate post-war years, the Woods' reflected the opportunities of the economic expansion that followed. In some cases purchases were made from wartime savings and veterans' grants, but in many others, particularly those involving durable goods as such as cars, refrigerators and stoves, acquisitions relied upon various forms of installment debt. According to a 1948 Dominion Bureau of Statistics survey, the average Canadian family was now running an annual deficit of \$137. By 1956 the average Canadian family owed over 12% of its total income and paid out \$135 a year in interest charges.<sup>39</sup> The average per capita installment debt had increased threefold since 1942.<sup>40</sup> The biggest credit users were young middle income families like the Woods, who typically bought far more on installment than poor families. In this age group it was not unusual to find forty-eight percent of income tied up in mortgage and installment payments.<sup>41</sup>

The problem was not so much wages, which had generally kept pace with rising prices, but the dramatic increase in new opportunities for consumption. In 1957 Procter

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<sup>39</sup> *Chatelaine*, January 1956.

<sup>40</sup> The use of consumer credit was not new. Debt had long been a strategy of household finance. Local merchant had generally allowed customers to run up accounts to be settled when crops were sold or wages received, however, credit in this case was generally used for the purchase of consumable rather than durable goods. The inter-war period had seen a dramatic expansion in the availability of credit to facilitate the purchase of an expanding range of household items, including automobiles and appliances. See Veronica Strong-Boag, *A New Day Recalled*, pp. 114-115. The tendency to view recent developments in the use of consumer credit as a "credit revolution," rather than an evolving practice should be considered a facet of the myth of lost economic virtue, representing moral argument rather than actual experience. Lendol Calder, *Financing The American Dream, A Cultural History of Consumer Credit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 23-26.

<sup>41</sup> *Chatelaine*, January 1956.



& Gamble reported that more than half of its current sales volume came from products that had not existed in 1945. For General Foods the figure was 36 per cent; and for the St. Regis Paper Company, 25 per cent. In the same year David Sarnoff, chairman of the board of R.C.A., noted "80 percent of the products we are now selling did not exist ten years ago." In 1958 the president of the National Biscuit Company pointed out that 75 percent of food volume was in products that had not existed twelve years before.<sup>42</sup> With wages largely stable, Canadians turned to various forms of credit to access this expanding world of consumer goods.<sup>43</sup>

By the mid 1950s *Chatelaine* articles advising "How to Borrow Wisely" (1951) had given way to those asking "How much money should your family owe?" (1956).<sup>44</sup> As *Food for Thought*, Canada's magazine of adult education, noted: "Those of us who are now in our forties are often sharply aware of a great gulf between our thinking and that of young people in their twenties. Older Canadians can remember the standards of their childhood; thrift, hard work, 'pay as you go'... 'Enjoy while you pay' is the new slogan... In war-time, we are expected to 'do without' as a patriotic duty; and in peace-time to buy even more than we need or want, for the same reason! ..."<sup>45</sup>

Together the Woods series and the responses to it (the article aroused considerable complaints from *Chatelaine* readers which will be examined in more detail

<sup>42</sup> Stuart Hendersen Britt, *The Spenders: Where and Why Your Money Goes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 102-103.

<sup>43</sup> In the late fifties, changes to the Bank Act that allowed for increased personal loans added fuel to the debate on the increasing use of consumer credit. Parr suggests that critiques of credit may have been linked to critiques of commodity culture, which was at that time adopting to more saturated markets by emphasizing style and engineering obsolescence. Parr, p. 108.

<sup>44</sup> *Chatelaine*, February 1951, January 1956.

<sup>45</sup> *Food for Thought*, December 1957, p. 107, 109.

below) highlight emerging tensions between old and new values: many Canadians still believed that taking on debt was wrong. The solution, *Chatelaine* implied, was to see the dilemma not as a moral problem but as a management problem. If the Woods learned how to manage their finances, they could have everything they wanted. Of course as the series itself showed, increases in income made domestic management quite a lot easier. With a steady white collar job and opportunities to earn additional income, the Woods family was positioned to take advantage of expanding consumer opportunities. Not every Canadian family was as fortunate.

### The Roses

In 1962 *Chatelaine* editors selected an "average" Canadian family living in an "average Canadian suburb" as the subject of a feature story: "101 Ways to Save Money--and look better, dress better, eat better and live better."<sup>46</sup> While the Woods needed only a period of tutelage under a single expert, the Rose family were advised by the staff of the *Chatelaine* Institute and a small team of consultants. While *Chatelaine's* previous profiles had devoted several paragraphs to introducing the feature family, the bulk of this article (13 of 16 pages) used the Roses to showcase the advice provided by this panel of experts, grouping recommendations under such captions as "How to Eat Better and Save", "See You Can Be Your Own Best Hairdresser and Save", "Have the Furniture You Really Want in Five Years and Save," etc. The Roses faded into the background of the story, supplanted by the magazine's detailed recommendations for food, fashion, home decorating, and practical spending advice.

Even before meeting with *Chatelaine*, the Rose family (Rita, Stan, and two

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<sup>46</sup> *Chatelaine*, January 1962, pp. 34-43, 48-52, 54.

children) practiced certain economies and was proud of its home management skills.

They had saved a down payment when Rita was working, before starting a family, and, as a matter of principle had agreed to postpone future purchases until they could pay cash.

"We're happier when we know we don't owe anything" Rita explained, "and we don't mind waiting for the things we'd like to have. We don't want many luxuries." In practice this meant that they ate meals in the kitchen while the dining area sat empty and listened to "semi-classical" records bought at low cost through a record club on a standard portable player while looking forward to a owning a high fidelity phonograph "some day." Family allowance cheques went directly into a trust savings account paying 4 1/2 percent interest. The goal of *Chatelaine's* intervention was to demonstrate how this conscientious family could improve their spending practices to improve their overall standard of living.

Rita Rose seemed to have greater freedom to remake herself and her home than her predecessors, in part due to increasing affluence.<sup>47</sup> With the key elements of persona and home life available for purchase in the marketplace, identity seemed to have become less fixed. As the decision-making family moved to the background, the magazine itself became the arbiter of appropriate expenditures. Compared with Marie and Joie, Rita was less a producer or a purchasing agent than a passive vehicle for *Chatelaine* to

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<sup>47</sup> Stan's relative absence from the story is marked in comparison with the attention given to his predecessors, Bill and Russ. This is consistent with Comacchio's findings that fatherhood, by the post-war era, had come to be associated almost exclusively with breadwinning, and also reflected the increasing separation of the suburban home and workplace. Cynthia Comacchio, "Bringing up Father: Defining a Modern Canadian Fatherhood, 1900-1940," in Chambers and Montaingy, (eds) p. 304, and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experience in Canada, 1945-1960," in Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita C. Fellman, *Rethinking Canada: the Promise of Women's History, Third Edition* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977).

demonstrate ideas that would help Canadians lead less expensive but considerably more fashionable lives. Most of the recommendations were far from lavish; many involved a combination of market participation and do-it-yourself production that had characterized the Menzie family. Rita's beauty make-over began with six cuts a year at a top salon (because "a good cut is worth every penny") but would be maintained with home permanents and the setting and styling techniques demonstrated by the magazine's beauty editor. Although Rita had come to rely on convenience foods as a working wife, *Chatelaine* redirected her menus towards more time intensive and less costly dishes. The recipes featured in the article were all devised by *Chatelaine* and professionally photographed in the test kitchen. One of the most noticeable differences in the lives of these families was the increased number of choices now available to the Roses and *Chatelaine*'s breathless sense of excitement about these opportunities. For example, it was possible for Rita to make a duster over into a party dress because she already had two light weight coats. The family could gear their expenditures toward an ideal furniture plan because they were already setting aside \$200 annually for furnishings. Their five year acquisition list, which began with an extension dining table and two chairs in 1962 and concluded with framed prints, plants and bunching tables in 1966, indicated a level of detail and long term commitment to spending significantly beyond that contemplated by the earlier families.

The chain of purchasing had been extended in terms of the number of goods involved, the timeframe needed to complete planned purchases, and the ongoing stream of spending required to avoid obsolescence implied in *Chatelaine*'s emphasis on an up-to-date haircut and wardrobe. As well, an aesthetic dimension was added to the



appreciation of everyday life. On the other hand, the magazine continued to point out opportunities to add labour in order to reduce costs, suggesting that Canadians continued to negotiate between store-bought and homemade according to their specific circumstances and abilities.

Families were encouraged to spend, providing that purchases were undertaken with caution and calculation, involving comparison shopping, expert guidance, and a long term budget. Indeed, many of *Chatelaine's* recommended ways to save now involved spending. For example, readers were instructed to pay their bills by cash to avoid cheque charges, advised to buy season tickets rather than individual tickets if they expected to attend recreational events regularly, and reminded to compare the price of repairs with the price of replacements because in recent years some articles had dropped in price while repair charges had increased. An attitude of thrift no longer implied the struggle to live within limited means, but rather the effort to improve one's overall standard of living by planned and thoughtful spending.

The broad shifts in consumption patterns evident in these three accounts are suggestive of the emergence and consolidation of modern consumption practices. The Menzies (1949) bought as little as possible and were presented as largely self-sufficient. The Woods (1954) tended to buy impulsively, a trait they learned to control by training and self-discipline. Once managed, their train of purchasing extended incrementally but infinitely into the future. In the Roses (1962) case the "purchasing impulse" was directed towards extended "networks of objects," such as the five year plan for home furnishings, comprehensive enough to include artwork and accessories.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the personal

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<sup>48</sup> French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard has observed that "Few objects today are

shopping of each woman expanded from Marie's single new dress (her first in four and a half years) to Rita Rose's wardrobe restyled with the aid of store-bought patterns and a new haircut maintained with home permanent kits. The systematic expansion of domestic consumption was accompanied by a change in emphasis from the reliance on self to the reliance on experts, and a shift in focus from non-pecuniary values to appearances carefully assembled through the judicious purchase of goods and services. The adjustments recommended by *Chatelaine's* panel of experts promised to help families make full use of the new opportunities available through the mass market and become more fully a member of the middle class. Even while counseling moderation, *Chatelaine* contributed to the creation of consumer demand for new things.<sup>49</sup>

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offered *alone*, without a context of objects to speak for them. And the relation of the consumer to the object has consequently changed: the object is not longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning. . . The arrangement directs the purchasing impulse towards *networks* of objects in order to seduce it and elicit . . . a maximal investment, reaching the limits of economic potential. Clothing, appliance, and toiletries thus constitute object *paths*, which establish inertial constraints on the consumer will proceed *logically* from one object to the next. The consumer will be caught up in a *calculus* of objects, which is quite different from the frenzy of purchasing and possession which arises from the simple profusion of commodities." Jean Baudrillard, "Consumer Society" in Lawrence Glickman (ed.) *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> The accounts presented by *Chatelaine* seldom mentioned one of the most significant phenomenon of the era: television. Although television came relatively late to Canada, it spread rapidly. The first Canadian television stations arrived only in 1952. By 1960 there were fifty-nine stations capable of reaching ninety percent of the population. During the same decade television sets became more affordable. In 1952 the average set cost over \$400, or almost twenty percent of an average annual income. By 1956 the cost of a basic set had fallen to under \$170. By the end of the decade more Canadians owned televisions than telephones.

As a mass media, television programs celebrated the family (usually but certainly not always the Anglo-Saxon middle class family), and promoted the opportunities available in a society of affluence. Many families found that the television schedule gave new structure to leisure time. The impact was especially powerful for children. In thousands of homes, children watched more or less the same shows, developed the same heroes, and

The move towards a society defined by its consumption practices saw increasing emphasis placed on the role of the wife as the family's primary spender. The 1949 visit to the Menzies presented husband and wife in the roles of producer, consumer and wage earner. At the outset of the 1954 article the husband was a wage earner rather than a producer and a consumer with little competence in the modern marketplace. In the course of the series, the husband-as-consumer was further marginalized and pushed out the home, now working evenings as well as days to finance purchases made by the household's increasingly skilled female "consumption expert." By 1963 the husband was all but absent from the home and the article, sent off to earn the wages needed to make *Chatelaine's* progressive program of transformation possible.

Increasing awareness of the collective impact of the "housewifely dollar" also brought renewed attention to the Canadian Association of Consumers.<sup>50</sup> As a lengthy feature in *Canadian Business Magazine* explained in "the early days businessmen regarded CAC as a group of overly enthusiastic women who were out to make life difficult for them. Today ... CAC has been successful in divorcing itself from the 'lunatic fringe' and communist-front troublemakers" and had become "a power not to be dismissed lightly by government or industry."<sup>51</sup> Now perceived as, literally, buying into

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were encouraged to buy the same products. Television was critical to the development of the child market, but the consumption of common products was also important in shaping the childhood world of leisure and reinforcing peer identity. Although it built on processes that had begun with mail order catalogues, advertising and radio, television suggested as never before that the possession of the latest fad would distinguish individuals within the neighbourhood as members of larger community of "childhood trendiness." Television, writes Canadian historian Doug Owsram, helped to give a generation a common perspective on the world and their place in it. Owsram, *Born at the Right Time*, pp. 87-96.

<sup>50</sup> *Canadian Business*, February 1956.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

the system, Canadian women and the CAC found themselves celebrated by business.

In 1950 the budgeting expert who would later advise the Woods family was telling *Maclean's* readers that "one of the biggest news stories of the decade and one you won't find on the financial page [is that] ... more women are handling family finances than ever before and experts say they make a better job of it than their husbands."<sup>52</sup> Women were described as "less sentimental" about money than men. Pride never got in their way; they dealt with whoever gave them the best rates and were persistent in their pursuit of financial goals. Margolius was careful to reassure readers that women's involvement in the family finances would not change the fundamental order of things. In his own case, he explained, "rather than resigning any male prerogatives I feel like the chairman of the board. As for womanly extravagances, I find my wife is definitely tighter with cash now that she has charge of it than when I doled it out to her. Then, what I gave her she spent. Now ... I can't get my wife to part with a dollar." Husbands, by comparison, were regarded as unlikely to "feel, pull, rub, squeeze, stretch, press and smell" the merchandise or to comparison shop.<sup>53</sup> New consumption practices which differentiated between skilled and unskilled consumers reinforced gender divisions within the family.<sup>54</sup> *Maclean's* drove the point home in a discussion of children's allowances, observing that "Nearly all educators stress that, whenever possible, the father

<sup>52</sup> *Maclean's*, October 1, 1950, pp. 12-13, 52.

<sup>53</sup> *Maclean's*, October 8, 1960.

<sup>54</sup> Wives and mothers did the majority of shopping, however, fathers had certain areas of specialization, including the purchase of major appliances, family vacations, recreational real estate, lawn and yard care, and the maintenance of the exterior of the house. Gendered relationships to consumer spending on leisure are explored in Robert Rutherford, "Fatherhood and Masculine Domesticity During the Baby Boom: Consumption and Leisure in Advertising and Life Stories," in Lori Chambers and Edger Andre Montignay (eds.), *Family Matters, Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*.



should pay the allowance personally instead of handing the job to mother. That way a child begins to understand father's place in the home."<sup>55</sup>

The shift from managing scarcity to managing relative abundance, and from budgeting to buying, should not be exaggerated. The emphasis on consumer goods was balanced by messages to plan spending and keep expectations modest: a mortgaged home, a car (possibly second hand), labour saving devices bought on the installment plan, book clubs and record collections were presented as the substance of the average Canadian's dreams. The families selected for presentation remained modest rather than

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<sup>55</sup> Dorothy Sangster, "Finance in the Nursery," *MacLean's*, December 15, 1948. Parenting and financial authorities both emphasized the need for children's allowances. Practice was seen as critical, because the ability to use money wisely was "not something you're born with, but something you learn." Providing children with a regular allowance was described as vital to future money management skills and family happiness. An allowance was neither a wage earned for chores around the home, nor a bribe for good behaviour, but was described as the child's rightful share of the family earnings. Articles repeatedly emphasized that, except in extreme cases, parents had no right to control their child's spending decisions. Even *The Canadian Banker* agreed, noting that "the main thing is to see that the allowance is prompt and regular and to leave the spending of it to the child." Extreme behaviours that might justify parental intervention marked the ends of the spectrum of respectable spending: frivolous spending on cheap candy, school yard gambling, and hoarding (regarded as possible evidence of deep emotional disturbances) were all to be condemned. Beyond this, it was up to the child to learn through experience the impact of personal spending decisions.

Increasingly, saving rather than spending was regarded as the pathological pattern of behaviour. *The Canadian Banker*, which might have been expected to encourage a more traditional approach to savings, agreed that "To save for savings sake is the essence of miserliness, to save for a specific purpose is the essence of good judgment." Dr. Blatz, Canada's most eminent Canadian child-rearing expert, stated the matter succinctly: "One only saves it for the purpose of spending it, so one never saves except for a purchase in the future."

See Dorothy Sangster, "Finance in the Nursery," *MacLean's*, December 15, 1948, N. B. Mallovy, "Teach Your Child the Value of Money," *The Canadian Banker, Journal of the Canadian Banker's Association*, Vol. 66, No. 1, Spring 1959, Dr. Blatz, "Training Your Child," *Chatelaine Magazine*, 1947. On Blatz and the popularity of childrearing experts in the 1950s, see O'ram pp. 33, 38-37. See also the discussion on child rearing which discouraged external forms of behavioural correction such as spanking because discipline was to be internalized and not imposed. Gleason, pp. 110-111.

gaudy. Their materialism was most frequently oriented to home and family. Money management no longer meant long-term self-denial; instead, it came to be seen as a matter of making choices and ordering priorities to ensure that each family was able to direct its income toward satisfying its needs and achieving its wants. Credit and installment payments mobilized the small surpluses of working and middle class families, incorporating those who would have been otherwise "unexploitable"<sup>56</sup> as a force of consumption, and helped to eliminate potential conflicts between savings and spending. The practical constraints imposed by the use of credit, like the rhetorical constraints expressed in the discussion of children's allowances, meant that consumption remained an organized and disciplinary process.

Reading about the experiences of the Menzies, the Woods and the Roses helped to legitimize new attitudes towards consumption by presenting images of a new way of life and instructions on how to achieve it. Although the understanding of household necessity had changed steadily in the fifteen years since the end of the war to include many more consumer items, making ends meet was a persistent theme.<sup>57</sup> The tension between desire and debt was not hidden, but addressed directly in stories about trade-offs and planned purchasing in which thrift had become less a matter of not spending than of spending wisely.

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<sup>56</sup> Baudrillard *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>57</sup> Korinek notes that "a concern with thriftiness permeated most of the food articles" in *Chatelaine* throughout the 1950s and 1960s. pp. 192-193. Parr has similarly observed that at least some homemakers resisted the lure of technological innovations they regarded as unsuited to Canadian conditions. Preferring simpler, more durable, wringer washers they delayed acceptance of mass produced automatic washers, continuing to trade-off personal labour for appliances that consumed less fuel and water and produced less waste. pp. 240-242. The degree to which these examples of resistance were the result of economic necessity or moral commitments remains an open question.

A money management guide issued in 1962 by Household Finance of Canada captured the new ethos of consumption, encouraging householders to shop "intelligently" by defining their values and goals, knowing their requirements and by developing a personal buying guide for purchases they planned to make in the future by collecting articles, advertisements and information from various product rating services.<sup>58</sup>

"Responsible consumership" the company assured its readers, was "a goal that can be reached by every shopper." The publication concluded with a check list to help shoppers evaluate their shopping skills. Consumers who could comfortably answer "Yes" to such questions as: "Is your spending an expression of your individual and family values and goals?", "Are you in the habit of using a well-planned shopping list to be sure you get the things you need and want?", "Do you compare prices and quality of various items before you buy?" and "Are you using your consumer power effectively in the part you play in our national economy?" were, in effect, given permission to spend. There was no need to make-do if one followed the rules and spent wisely.

### **Evidence of Resistance**

Acceptance of new norms was far from complete. Canadian historians Veronica Strong-Boag, Joy Parr and Valerie Korinek have all documented resistance to increasing consumerism from within the ranks of Canadian women.<sup>59</sup> *Chatelaine* regularly turned space over to readers who disapproved of new trends in its letters page. In most cases, the complainants seemed to view themselves as lone voices continuing to hold to traditional values. Objections that *Chatelaine's* feature families were atypical in their income and

<sup>58</sup> Household Finance, *Your Shopping Dollar* (Toronto and Chicago, 1962)

<sup>59</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experience in Canada, 1945-1960," Parr, especially Chapter Eleven, "A Caution of Excess"; Korinek, pp. 88-93.

unrealistic in their spending patterns were common, regardless of whether the feature families were working class like the Roses, with incomes generally in line with Canadian medians, or white collar, like the Woods, with an annual income somewhat above average.<sup>60</sup> It seemed to be the lower income readers, often, though not always, from rural regions, who argued that the editors had erred in their selection of representative families.<sup>61</sup> However, many of these criticisms were directed not simply toward budgets, but toward all consumer values.

The series on the Woods family aroused particularly strong responses that highlighted the moral sensitivities underpinning the discussion of domestic spending. The two aspects of the series that received the most comments were the Woods' level of indebtedness and the absence of church contributions in their budget. Often both themes were linked, as in this response by a reader who expressed outrage at the Woods' lifestyle and budgeting efforts. "Tell them...to get down on their knees and ask God to take away the foolish pride that makes them want to live beyond their means" instructed the correspondent, adding that "According to the picture they have much waste land that could be producing raspberries, strawberries, currants, boysenberries, tomatoes... [could] use more stews, soups, puddings....[and] Out of each cheque to put some in the bank." Readers loyal to traditional values saw the patterns of living that the magazine regarded as new but normal as an affront. While some budgeting experts considered debt a "useful tool" that effectively increased family purchasing power, a segment of *Chatelaine's* readership clearly continued to regard debt as evidence of moral weakness and to the failure to hold true to Protestant values of self-denial and restraint. Those who regarded

<sup>60</sup> Korinek, pp. 290-291, 358, 421, n.18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.



thrift as a core value of good citizenship and the key to personal and national prosperity, believed that the availability of consumer credit destabilized society by making it easier for people to live lives devoted to instant gratification and consumer hedonism.

"Why should a family earning \$300 a month require help to budget their income? I will tell you why—because God has been left out of their scheme of things," wrote another reader, adding "If other families were selfish like the Woods the world would be more pagan than ever." Even those who saw the debt as largely a problem of financial management, as in the case of the reader who insisted "I was appalled at the thought that there were those who could not raise two children and keep out of debt on nearly \$300 a month. I would be in heaven on this income...getting into debt is entirely out of the question as we could never get along at all if we did," obviously equated the management of finances with responsible behaviour. "We pay as we go or do without" was a maxim that continued to have followers.<sup>62</sup>

*Chatelaine* seemed caught off guard by the vehemence of reader responses. On two occasions the magazine felt obliged to defend the Woods. In one case clergymen were contacted to ascertain typical church contributions and readers were assured that the Woods family budget was in keeping with current charitable practices. In effect,

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<sup>62</sup> Parr offers a different interpretation, noting that while the total volume of debt rose during this period, debt as a portion of income remained largely the same, suggesting that concern about indebtedness was not always about mounting levels of debt but also about declining levels of saving. Insofar as capital investment (essentially borrowing for industrial purposes) was regarded as the key to economic growth, consumer spending potentially reduced the amount of savings available for reinvestment in business. At least some of those who actually borrowed regarded the taking-on and repayment of debt, not as moral weakness but as evidence of trustworthiness and good character. The moral interpretation of savings and borrowing remained open to a number of different interpretations, depending on one's position in the economy and social status. Parr, *Domestic Goods*, pp. 101-102, 109-110, 112-113.

*Chatelaine* moved to defend the Woods against charges of "what ought to be" with evidence of "what is," setting normative standards against the moral objections raised by readers.<sup>63</sup> The suggestion that a middle class lifestyle was possible for all through proper management rather than wage increases helped to keep class off the agenda for social change.<sup>64</sup> The appeal to normative standards avoided a direct battle with traditional morality while firmly establishing social constraints.

At a time when scarcity was no longer seen to constrain progress, most Canadians were willing to accept that increasing consumption would no longer subvert the social order. The capacity of goods to provide meaning was seldom questioned. The horizons of

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<sup>63</sup> Vociferous debate erupted in the fifties around the decisions of working mothers, especially middle class mothers with young children, who were seen as voluntarily choosing to work in order to expand their own and their family's participation in consumer society. While the involvement of Canadian women in waged labour had increased dramatically during the Second World War, it was generally presumed that women would "celebrate peace by returning home," leaving jobs available for returning veterans. For a variety of reasons this was not the case and by 1951 it was clear that women, especially married women, were entering the labour force in high numbers. For both sides, the debate turned, not on the possible need for wages but on the uses to which income would be put. Traditionalists emphasized the trade-off between what they regarded as "artificially high" standards of living obtained with the aid of a second income and family values. Insisting that married women's wages were largely pin-money, spent on frills, they defended the importance of work in the home as a full time job that should remain outside of the market. Supporters endorsed wage-earning as a means to increase access to the prerequisites of modern living. Working wives were "symbols of a new and more generous age" that had left behind the economy of restraint, shortages and sacrifice. Women's wages did not threaten the social order but helped to underpin an enlarged community of Canadian consumers. Strong-Boag suggests that the additional income contributed by working wives was a factor creating the perception of an expanding middle-class helping more families to demonstrate the visible manifestations of middle class living, including better housing, cars, appliances and decent clothing. Of course, by focusing attention on those who were regarded as working by choice rather than necessity, public discussion concentrated on the morality of consumer spending and avoided the problem of poverty. Veronica Strong-Boag, *Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60*, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Fall 1994.

<sup>64</sup> Hilton, p. 169.

private life, for both families and individuals, were increasingly constructed with the opportunities provided by the market which presented itself as a source of symbols available for constructing narratives of identity. Purchases were understood to demonstrate success and social mobility, allegiance to certain cultural values, and to denote group membership. Although change was emphasized more than stability and appreciation of the old had given way to the celebration of the new, family enrichment remained central to virtuous consumerism.<sup>65</sup>

Insofar as the presentation of normative spending by the mass media involved a package of goods beyond the reach of most families, each household would have to negotiate treacherous terrain, adjusting its spending to approach the normative vision of middle class life without placing themselves in financial jeopardy. Buying things would help Canadians become modern, provided spending was kept within the limits of the family budget. American historian Gary Cross observes that post war consumption succeeded in part because it could overcome contradictions few wanted to choose between.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps conflicts between aspiration and restraint, change and continuity, individuality and belonging did not have to be resolved, but could be surmounted through consumption.

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<sup>65</sup> Elaine Tyler May, "The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home," in Glickman, p. 301. Veronica Strong-Boag observed that the gender divisions associated with suburban living were attractive because they made manifest values that Canadians already held. Veronica Strong-Boag, *Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60*, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Fall 1994, pp. 481, 483.

<sup>66</sup> Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 98, 103, 109.

### 11. Social Scientists, Humanists and the Question of Consumption

Daily life emerged as a prominent theme in public discussion and academic thought in the post war years.<sup>1</sup> The end of war signaled the return to "normal" but certainly not to the conditions of the past. After a period of transition, opportunities to buy consumer goods and suburban housing spread rapidly through society.<sup>2</sup> It was, as Canadian philosopher George Grant commented, as if people were suddenly immersed in "a set of conditions and experiences so new and so different from the past that nobody can describe them adequately or fathom accurately what is coming to be in the world."<sup>3</sup>

The counterpoint to the celebration of progress in the mass media was a stubborn resistance to the emerging consumer norms in intellectual circles, where daily

<sup>1</sup> Doug Owsram discusses the centrality of a romanticized, idealized view of home in the immediate post-war period. Doug Owsram, "Canadian Domesticity in the Postwar Era: in P. Neary and J. L. Granatstein, *The Veteran's Charter and Post-World War II Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1998). Schilling provides a very useful exploration of this theme in Derek Schilling, "Everyday Life and the Challenge to History in Post War France: Braudel, Lefebvre, Certeau," *diacritics*, Spring 2003.

<sup>2</sup> A sense of the speed and degree of change can be conveyed statistically:

| Equipment               | Percentage of homes |      |      |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------|------|
|                         | 1963                | 1951 | 1941 |
| Refrigerator            | 94                  | 48   | 21   |
| Telephone               | 87                  | 60   | 40   |
| Radio                   | 96                  | 93   | 78   |
| Automobile, one or more | 73                  | 43   | 37   |
| Television set          | 90                  | ---  | ---  |
| Vacuum cleaner          | 72                  | 42   | 24   |
| Washing machine         | 87                  | 74   | ---  |
| Phonograph              | 54                  | ---  | ---  |
| Freezer                 | 18                  | ---  | ---  |

#### PERCENTAGE OF HOMES WITH GIVEN FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Frederick Elkin, *The Family in Canada* (Canadian Conference on the Family, 1964), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> George Grant, "An Ethic of Community" in Michael Oliver (ed.), *Social Purpose for Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 6-7.



experiences were regularly described as standardized and spiritually impoverished. Persistent debates swirled around the erosion of social bonds and the determination of appropriate ends given vastly expanded means. Canadian families, sociologists insisted, had not only failed to buy happiness, they had become trapped in a perpetual state of tension, caught between limited means and an expanding list of wants. Commercial culture, supported by mass media, was seen to foster an homogenized worldview that undermined independent and critical thinking. Yet, even those who denounced the social transformations that accompanied new consumption practices were impressed by increases in material abundance and rising standards of living and excited by the emergence of new technologies.

In both the social sciences and humanities (now largely separate fields) intellectuals grappled with the implications of material abundance. As political scientist J. A. Corry explained, society's focus on materialism had been understandable in the past, when "Chill poverty froze the genial currents of the soul." But those struggling to conquer poverty, he insisted, had

all the while. . . dreamed that, if the curse could be lifted, the spacious opportunities thus opened would lift spirits everywhere and we would soar beyond the confines of the material. We have begun to fear that this may not happen. On the evidence, we seem to be settling down to enjoy ourselves in the lap of comfort. The advertisers give us soothing assurance that this is all we know, or need to know. Indeed, we have come to fear that our children learn more about the good life from the advertisers than from their teachers.

It surely does not overstate the case to say that life needs more purpose than can be found in taking our ease among our gadgets.<sup>4</sup>

As Corry suggested, the economic shifts which had altered both the ends and means of

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<sup>4</sup> J. A. Corry, *The Changing Conditions of Politics*, Alan B. Plaut Memorial Lectures, Ottawa, Carleton University, March 1963 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 23, 46, 53.

daily life were seen to have repercussions in the social and moral order as well as the material world. Academics, intellectuals and politicians as well as reporters writing for mass media publications geared toward middle class readers studied the conduct of ordinary Canadians, publicizing and debating the acceptability of new patterns of behaviour. Their articles, whether in *Chatelaine Magazine* or the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* displayed remarkable similarity, often taking the form of research projects that sought to assess the meaning of changing social norms.

### The Social Sciences

While representations in the mass media had the effect of normalizing new practices, the social sciences took a more rigorous approach in an effort to determine the parameters of consumer society. Four projects were of particular importance, reaching beyond the academic community to shape the way Canadians saw themselves. In these studies consumer society often took on a pathological dimension. Material abundance, far from resolving the tensions of modernity, seemed to have opened the door to emotional confusion, ethical contradictions and incompatibilities in belief.

The first of these projects began as a study commissioned by the Canadian Mental Health Association to examine child-rearing practices in a typical Canadian suburb.<sup>5</sup> The social scientists involved in *Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* approached the suburbs on an ethnographic basis with the tone and level of scrutiny popularized by Margaret Mead and other anthropologists as they set out to examine the rites and rituals of primitive Polynesian tribes in far away places. The final report, published after five years of study, created a sensation and became a Canadian best-

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<sup>5</sup> John R. Seeley, R. Alexander Sim, Elizabeth Loosley, *Crestwood Heights, A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

seller.

The community chosen as the subject of this study and given the pseudonym of Crestwood Heights was a thinly disguised upper middle class suburb of Toronto, Forest Hill. While this choice was more affluent than the norm, scholars defended it as representative of "what life is *coming to be* in North America." The community, they explained, was "normative or 'typical,' not in the sense of the average of an aggregate of such communities, but in the sense of representing the norm to which middle-class community-life tends now to move."<sup>6</sup>

Crestwood Heights was also presented as typical in another way: as the familiar approximation of the North American dream. "In infinite variety, yet with an eternal sameness, it flashes on the movie screen . . . . It fills the pages of glossy magazines devoted to the current best in architecture, house decoration, food, dress, and social behaviour. The innumerable service occupations bred of an urban culture will think anxiously about people in such a community in terms of what 'they' will buy or use this year." Crestwood Heights was the goal of those who "struggle to translate the promise of America into a concrete reality for themselves, and, even more important, for their children."<sup>7</sup> It was less representative of how people lived than of how they wanted to live. It was, as the authors described it, a "thing of dreams" pinned down in time and space, but it was also part of a tradition of dreaming. There was in this neighborhood, they explained, "a deep allegiance to the great North American dream, a dream of material heaven in the here and now, to be entered by the successful elect." The dream was not confined to North America alone; it was "perhaps as old as the world itself," but

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

in Crestwood Heights the dream was seen to have a "specific content."

Nothing in it suggests an age of innocence and peace in the future, when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb" and "the little child shall lead them"; nor is the goal a "land flowing with milk and honey," where men shall live without effort. What is envisioned is rather a material abundance to be achieved and maintained only by unremitting struggle and constant sacrifice. No citizen of Big City or its hinterland, casting a longing and covetous eye towards Crestwood Heights, could easily envisage a life of leisure there. Should he, by some stroke of fortune or through his own exertions, enter the promised land, he will fully accept continuing work and increasing anxiety as the price he must pay if he does not wish to be cast out of his paradise.<sup>8</sup>

Seen through the eyes of sociologists, the Crestwood Heights home was "a solution to the problem of survival," concerned not with the basic necessities of life but the production of children who would perpetuate its values and way of life.<sup>9</sup> The details of home decorating decisions, of holiday celebrations, the social functions of summer camps and school clubs—all of which involved consumption choices—were carefully considered. The home itself was understood as both a repository of artifacts and an artifact in its own right. Various described as a symbol of status in which new purchases could be displayed and validated by the community, and as a supermarket "adapted for the staging of productions" with rooms "oddly reminiscent of a series of department store windows,"<sup>10</sup> the suburban dwelling was the ultimate "consumption unit" and also a place "to practice and perfect consumption skills."<sup>11</sup>

In their consumption patterns, the residents of Crestwood Heights sought not only to reproduce their way of life, but also to establish and defend their place in society. If the home was to be a proper exhibition of status and an aid to the male career, it needed to be

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 43, 46, 47, 49, 51.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.



symbolically prepared and continually "defended against attack."<sup>12</sup> This process not only required the homemaker to be aware of current decorating trends, but also to balance decisions between items to be retained in order to link the family with important traditions and those which needed to be changed to denote upward mobility. This process required acts of management and symbol manipulation that were presented as the domestic counterpart of the managerial occupations often held by male spouses.<sup>13</sup> Both husband and wife were identified as post-industrial workers dealing primarily with information and the mediated production of symbols. While the first part of the book explored the material and cultural dimensions of new modes of community life, the second half examined the formation of the suburban belief system. At the outset of the study authors had noted that the relationship between the residents who stocked their homes with the newest goods and the people who supplied them with these goods was complex and reciprocal. As the study unfolded, the authors found themselves involved in similar relationships of supply and demand. The growing demand for new ideas, particularly for solutions to the social problems experienced by modern families in new settings, had begun to produce its own supply of experts. New beliefs in mental health and child rearing were adopted by Crestwood Heights consumers with the same rapidity and enthusiasm that greeted material fads and fashions, with the result that preferred

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

<sup>13</sup> American reviewers of the study commented on the high degree of role differentiation between Crestwood Heights spouses, in which the women developed her expertise in the cultural realm while the male focused almost exclusively on work, each an expert in their own realm. Riesman, for example, regarded this sharp division of the sexes reminiscent of an older America. *Ibid.*, p. xii. See also Donald Foley, "Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life" reviewed in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring 1957, p. 219; Robert Rapoport, Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life" reviewed in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 60, No. 1, February 1958, p. 170.

methods of childrearing and education were in constant flux.

Seeing themselves as a part of the same socio-economic system they had sought to study, the authors were concerned that their involvement had the potential to aggravate rather than stabilize the mental health of the community.<sup>14</sup> Initially they had aspired to study the neighborhood in accordance with the traditional paradigms of science.

Prominent American sociologist David Riesman introduced the final publication, noting that the team had wanted to better their community yet leave it unharmed and unaffected, avoiding the roles of profit seeker or practitioner.<sup>15</sup> As it turned out, Crestwood Heights was "a consumption unit for ideas, views, theories, opinions" produced elsewhere "by a core of persons specialized in such production."<sup>16</sup> Consumer society was not simply a material paradise but a community of common aspirations, shaped in part by the effort to attain the current best. In this setting, the "belief market" operated to provide commodities exactly like any other of the consumer goods Crestwood Heights residents enjoyed. Families were well-meaning and caring but the disappearance of tradition encouraged a consumer approach that destabilized psyches as well as material surroundings. The values and practices of the market overwhelmed the standards of scientific practice. Obsolescence threatened social theory as well as the family car and the living room furnishings. In such a setting, sociology easily became another mass

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<sup>14</sup> See on this theme two essays by one of the authors of the Crestwood Heights study which discuss the impact of rapid change and particularly the unintended consequences of increased self-consciousness that result from research in the community. John R. Seeley, "Social Values, the Mental Health Movement, and Mental Health," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 286, March 1953, pp. 22-23. John R. Seeley, "Social Science in Social Action," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 17, No. 1, February 1951, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

commodity.

Canadian sociologist S. D. Clark conducted a different series of studies of the Canadian family, exploring the material rather than the mental forms of suburbia. Clark regarded the dynamics of suburban growth as a market driven phenomenon rather than the product of ideological commitment. The suburban home, as Clark described it, was purely a commodity.<sup>17</sup> For the most part it was the price of a house and little else which determined who lived in any particular area.<sup>18</sup>

Families who moved to the suburbs in search of housing were typically young, with no substantial savings and modest incomes.<sup>19</sup> Although the purchase of a new suburban home was seldom ruinous, it had the initial effect of making families poorer and marked the beginning of a long term commitment to an ongoing series of expenditures and a significant financial burden. To finance the down payment on a house and to secure even minimal furnishings these families were required to borrow money, to assume heavy mortgage obligations, and to take on installment payments. For this reason, Clark observed, the overall impact of buying a new home was to raise the standard of

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<sup>17</sup> Of all the commodities included in the so-called standard package of goods, the single family detached home was the most costly. After 1954, most suburban housing in Canada was being mass produced by large, integrated developers along quasi-industrialized lines: large areas of raw land were assembled, cleared and subdivided; trades were organized to complete their tasks in rapid succession; prefabricated parts were used whenever possible to reduce time and labour costs; and a full range of advertising and sales techniques were brought to bear on the market in order to move product as expeditiously as possible. For a discussion of suburban standardization, see Owsram, *Born at the Right Time*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>18</sup> S. D. Clark, *Urbanism and the Changing Canadian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 29-30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30. For those purchasing homes above \$30,000, Clark suggested that "investment in the home represents an investment as well in a particular way of life" and involvement in community organization increased, at least in part, as a means to protect property values. However, below this range, (which meant the majority of homebuyers), the chief concern was finding a home priced within reach

housing but lower the standard of living.<sup>20</sup>

Suburban society, as Clark saw it, was almost always a debtor society.<sup>21</sup> The majority of families bought up to or slightly beyond what they could afford.<sup>22</sup> Those who could afford more than the down payment required in any particular area tended to look elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> From this perspective, the trade-offs the three *Chatelaine* families had made in their food budgets, entertainment choices and clothing expenditures in order to finance their homes were typical. In the fifteen years after the war, more than a million Canadians moved to suburban homes.<sup>24</sup> Participating in this migration involved young Canadian families in financial situations that were largely beyond their previous experiences and at odds with traditional values towards debt. And yet, a home with the "standard package of goods" was beyond their means without it.

Because the decision to live in the suburbs was primarily the result of market forces, Clark insisted that there was no suburban "mindset" at work: only the need for affordable housing.<sup>25</sup> Indeed he rejected suburban stereotypes as the creation of "urban loving intellectuals" who projected patterns of bureaucratic organization and mass

<sup>20</sup> S. D. Clark, *The Suburban Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 120. This publication was the culmination of work begun in Clark's 1960 study for CMHC, a new federal agency with a mandate to support housing through design and planning policy as well as financial assistance.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> O'ram, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> To the extent that the suburbs revealed a certain uniformity, Clark insisted that the problem was not that the suburbs shaped those who lived there, but that only certain kinds of people chose to move to the suburbs. Clark observed that it was those people without strong ethnic or religious identification and limited class attachments who were most likely to make the move, while the rich and poor remained in the city. It was this tendency and the social sifting characteristics of housing prices that created relatively homogenous neighborhoods. *Ibid.*, p. 22. *Suburban Society*, pp. 98-99.



communication which they decried onto the suburbs.<sup>26</sup> Clark regarded their critique as a form of intellectual snobbery and moral judgment that largely ignored the desires of Canadians families.<sup>27</sup>

Clark did not ignore the problems commonly associated with suburban life. He acknowledged that the aesthetic, environmental and infrastructure weakness of suburban communities were considerable, but noted that better planning had social costs in the form of reduced freedoms. Even if other forms of housing could have been made available at affordable prices, Clark insisted that the Canadian public clearly possessed specific preferences. Young families may not have fully understood the costs of suburban life, but they valued private home ownership, wanted to be away from the city centre, and to live in the freedom of socially non-centered and anonymous neighborhoods.<sup>28</sup>

The provision of housing followed the rules of commodity exchange in a free market: consumers made largely rational choices among the goods made available by the market; the market made goods available in response to consumer desires. Because the suburbs were structured primarily by the pursuit of affordable housing, consumer society was largely a society of choice. Canadians were again moving to a new frontier in pursuit of opportunity. The interests of society, expressed through the market, were the aggregate of the individual choices made by Canadian consumers.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37. To the extent that the suburbs revealed a certain uniformity, Clark insisted that the problem was not that the suburbs shaped those who lived there, but that only certain kinds of people chose to move to the suburbs. Clark observed that it was those people without strong ethnic or religious identification and limited class attachments who were most likely to make the move, while the rich and poor remained in the city. It was this tendency and the social sifting characteristics of housing prices that created relatively homogenous neighborhoods. *Ibid.*, p. 22. *Suburban Society*, pp. 98-99.

While Clark emphasized the essential rationality of the market, his fellow sociologist John Porter emphasized the degree to which social background constrained life opportunities. In *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965) Porter argued that Canada's understanding of itself as a socially egalitarian society sprang from idealized images of frontier and rural life. In the urban industrial setting, historical image of equality lingered, fostering equally idealized images of a middle level classlessness in which there is a general uniformity of possessions.<sup>29</sup> Porter argued, however, that middle class uniformity was largely an illusion based on the superficial similarities that ignored both the sacrifices required by low income earners and the privileges of the wealthy. While Canadians subscribed to values of liberty, equality and opportunity, there was significant structural inequality in Canadian society.<sup>30</sup> Porter challenged "the comfortable fiction that Canada was a classless society, asserting the presence of a hierarchical structure of class, power and ethnicity, and emphasizing how social background affected life opportunities, including people's chances of getting better jobs, good income, higher education, a good quality of life and even good health."<sup>31</sup>

In postwar Canada, Porter wrote that social hierarchy was most clearly distinguished by the pursuit of different objectives, ranked from the material to the

<sup>29</sup> John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1965), p. 4. *The Vertical Mosaic* was the culmination of eleven years of research and writing. Substantial portions had previously appeared as articles in the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* (1955, 1956, 1957 and 1958) and in two chapters in *Social Purpose for Canada* (1961). In addition to *The Vertical Mosaic* see John Porter, "Elite Groups: A Scheme for the Study of Power in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Nov. 1955), and John Porter, "Canadian Character in the Twentieth Century," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 370, March 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Rick Helmes-Hayes and James Curtis (ed.), *The Vertical Mosaic Revisited* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 13.

abstract. Preoccupation with the acquisition of durable consumer goods such as cars, refrigerators, electrical appliances as a characteristic of only the lowest levels of the middle class.<sup>32</sup> The higher levels of the middle class were less concerned with the "ownership of gadgetry" than the consumption of services. Access to the best obstetricians, pediatricians, nursery schools, ballet and music lessons ensured the attainment of value-oriented goals such as good health, privacy, security, and a sense of cultural accomplishment. It was the ability to consume things which could "neither be bought with a small down payment and three years to pay nor be used as security for a chattel mortgage" that Porter argued identified the "real middle class."<sup>33</sup> Canada's elites took consumption largely for granted. Segregated in private schools, clubs and associations, they emphasized power over others, the control of resources and the ability to perpetuate existing institutions and values as the distinguishing markers of class. Ultimately, consumption concerns were what separated the rulers from the ruled. The middle class package of goods was not the mark of social homogeneity but evidence of class structure.

Porter observed, just as Marsh had twenty years earlier, that while the middle class did not exist in statistical terms, the middle class ideal influenced how Canadians defined their goals and their vision of the good life.<sup>34</sup> Modern advertising and consumers'

<sup>32</sup> Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 126.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Porter used the idea of class in two different ways: both as a descriptive term determined by economic characteristics rooted in measurable inequalities such as income, education and property ownership; and as a relational term referencing prestige rankings. Class was the artificial creation of social investigators; it was also something that "became real as people experience it."<sup>34</sup> In a similar way, his essays discussed the standard package of goods both statistically (as a census of material goods) and sociologically (individuals consumed particular products because they belonged to

magazines like *Chatelaine* were devoted to the task of constructing the ideal way of life through articles on childrearing, homemaking, sexual behavior, health, sport, and hobbies and had done much to standardize the image of middle class consumption levels and middle class behaviour. Canadians overwhelmingly and enthusiastically consumed American culture, both popular and high. American broadcasting and print media contributed substantially to Canadian values.<sup>35</sup> Porter asserted that fifty-four percent of Canadians had no chance of meeting this made-in-America standard. The disparity between average incomes and normative ideals meant that people were trying to define their social identity by a level of consumption which they were unlikely to attain in reality.

In spite of real and serious social inequalities, middle class intellectuals projected the image of their own class on the classes above and below them. The ideal of middle class equality, Porter complained, supported society's blindness to the structure of class

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particular groups). The distinction between class as it was experienced and class as it was measured was not unique to Porter. Leonard Marsh, for example, had noted a similar phenomenon in his 1937 study *Canadians In and Out of Work*. Porter expanded on Marsh's description of consumer practices as class determinants, in part by expanding the parameters of consumption. Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 12.

French cultural critic Jean Baudrillard, on the other hand, suggests that the "standard package" was less about the possession of material goods than the ideal of conformity. The need was not for particular objects as much as it was a "need" or desire for social meaning. Baudrillard positions consumption in relation to the rise and control of new productive forces in a high output economic system. Themes of individual fulfillment, pleasure, affluence, and expenditure displace older themes of thrift, self-discipline, and self-denial. New methods of indoctrination replace old strategies that were, in any case, losing their effectiveness in a society of increasing prosperity. As conformity and the satisfaction of need became intertwined, needs and norms came to be understood as equivalent.

<sup>35</sup> Both Marsh and Porter asserted that Canada's middle class consumption ideal was based largely on American standards, although neither made clear whether these standards were real even for Americans or entirely the product of Hollywood and the advertising media.



difference. The worldview of the poor and the underprivileged was neglected "as though they did not exist."<sup>36</sup> Distorting social reality with the presentation of a class-less, affluent society gave legitimacy to the ongoing dominance of elites. The suggestion that a middle class pattern of life was possible for all through proper management rather than wage increases helped to keep class off the agenda for social change.

In periods of economic prosperity, when individual gain was the prevailing value, Porter suggested that the common vision of an all-encompassing moral order disappeared.<sup>37</sup> Consumption patterns seen as normal or ordinary were depoliticized by their supposed ordinariness or normalcy.<sup>38</sup> Society had "experienced a great increase in means without a corresponding articulation of ends."<sup>39</sup> Rising incidences of social disorders pointed to society's failure to produce "human happiness," however the statistical emphasis on increasing per capita consumption obscured other measures of quality of life.<sup>40</sup>

Both Porter and Clark positioned the Canadian family in a state of tension, stretched between their financial abilities and goals. The difference was that Clark saw suburban families striving to pay for dreams partially attained, while Porter saw families who would never be able to attain their dreams. For Clark, consumption increases were generally progressive, offering increasing choice and rising standards of living. Differences in lifestyle reflected differences in income. Suburban society was a debtor society but families had exercised their prerogatives in a largely rational manner. For

<sup>36</sup> Porter, *Vertical Mosaic*, p. 457-459; Porter, "Elite Groups," pp. 499, 511,

<sup>37</sup> Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 558.

<sup>38</sup> Hilton, p. 169.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> John Porter, "Freedom and Power" in Michael Oliver (ed), *Social Purpose for Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 36.

Porter, rising standards of living served to increase the separation between classes. The concept of a uniform middle class was a false image that served to conceal growing inequalities between social groups. While Porter saw betrayal of fundamental commitments to equality and especially to equality of opportunity, Clark was more sanguine. At issue were two views of consumer behaviour: rational choice or the pursuit of illusion. In spite of these differences, both saw particular patterns of consumption as the marker of middle-class life. One scholar interpreted this as movement away from the ideals of an older Canadian society, the other saw families realizing their ideals in the marketplace.

#### **Towards an Economics of Consumption**

By the early 1960s public consensus defined North American society variously as "affluent," "opulent," and "advanced." The problem of need, it was frequently noted, had given way to the problem of want. The conditioning of wants became a central issue in American consumer criticism in the fifties. In a series of best selling books, including *The Hidden Persuaders* by Vance Packard, *The Organization Man* by William Whyte, *The Affluent Society* by John Kenneth Galbraith, and *The Lonely Crowd* by Herbert Marcuse, consumer society was seen to culminate in a standard package of goods that encapsulated a way of life. Needs were described as artificially generated, directed not so much at objects but at values by advertisers trying to dispose of product. Recognizing that the stabilization of demand could bring the economy to a halt, some social critics proposed that discontent was deliberately cultivated.<sup>41</sup>

It was in this context that Canadian economist Harry Johnson presented several

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<sup>41</sup> On this theme see also Baudrillard, pp. 39-47.

papers exploring the relationship of classic economic theory to modern society of opulence.<sup>42</sup> Johnson positioned his essays as commentaries on the work of fellow economist, the Canadian born John Kenneth Galbraith. Both economists agreed that the theoretical apparatus of classical economics which had been "formed and shaped by an atmosphere of grinding poverty" was no longer relevant.<sup>43</sup> Johnson disagreed, however, with Galbraith's assertion that past conditions of "real scarcity" had been succeeded by present conditions of "contrived scarcity" that depended upon the creation of false needs and luxurious levels of private consumption sustained by the installment plan, high wages and chronic inflation.<sup>44</sup> While Galbraith differentiated between a baseline of real needs and artificial needs stimulated by advertising, Johnson believed that no such distinction was possible. All needs, he asserted, beyond the most basic requirements of physical survival were socially determined. Indeed, Johnson argued that it was the increasing wealth of society which most clearly showed that the line between necessity and luxury was not fixed. Modern North American society was not simply a traditional society with greater levels of affluence and a higher standard of living, but something different. What

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<sup>42</sup> Harry Johnson, *The Canadian Quandary, Economic Problems and Policies* (Ottawa: Carleton Library, 1977), p. 237. Several essays in this collection appeared in the previous decade. "The Political Economy of Opulence" was first published in *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4, Nov. 1960; "The Social Policy of an Opulent Society," was prepared for the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting and Conference of the Canadian Welfare Council, Ottawa, May 29, 1961, "Advertising in Today's Economy" was first published in *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. LXIX, No. 4, Winter 1963; "Apologia for Ad Men," was first delivered as a speech to the Toronto Chapter of the American Marketing Association, February 26, 1963. Johnson was a prolific author and one of Canada's most respected academic economists. For discussions of Johnson's writings on consumer society see Richard E. Caves, "Harry Johnson as a Social Scientist," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 92, No. 4, August 1984; and W. Paul Strassman, "Optimum Consumption Patterns in High-Income Nations," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 28, No. 3, August 1962.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

was needed was a new political economy of opulence to guide policy makers.<sup>45</sup> Johnson argued that the logical and most interesting place to begin was with a theory of consumption and demand "since it is on the consumption side that the phenomenon and special problems of opulence appear most clearly."<sup>46</sup> The key to this new political economy lay in recognizing that economic progress improved both the production function and the consumption function. As far back as Marshall, economists had recognized that "the purpose of economic organization was not merely to satisfy wants, but to create wants."<sup>47</sup> The emergence of new wants was inevitable as the wealth of society increased and should not be considered the result of artificial or manipulative process. It was inevitable that increasing income would result in the gratification of less essential wants. The "margin of want-satisfaction," he explained, tended to move from the physiological to the psychological and sociological as the wealth of society grows.<sup>48</sup> Progress was expressed "both in improvements in the production function, and in improvements in the consumption function."<sup>49</sup> Demand evolved as wealth increased simultaneously satisfying wants and raising the standards of wants.

Johnson proposed that contemporary concerns about advertising should be addressed as a "fundamentally philosophical" rather than economic. Could the satisfaction of wants created by advertisers be regarded as a social gain? Johnson argued yes, contending that all economically relevant wants are learned, "and, what is more

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241. Johnson cited American economist Frank Knight, who similarly noted that "one of the most basic human social characterizes is a continuing desire to improve and educate one's tastes." Frank Knight, "The Ethics of Competition" (1937).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.



important, all better tastes have to be acquired by study and practice."<sup>50</sup> Distinctions drawn between base material wants and elevated spiritual wants reflected social valuations rather than intrinsic merit. Ultimately the ranking of different wants, he argued, depended on whether there existed generally accepted standards for distinguishing better from worse taste and a social process by which these standards are learned and enforced.

Johnson proposed that the economic nature of consumer goods in a wealthy society had changed. "Not tea, but TV," he wrote, should be considered as "the exemplary commodity of the age of opulence." Consumption no longer involved necessities or even goods that were used up or consumed in the traditional sense. It was the steady stream of services in which production and consumption were ongoing that distinguished a truly affluent society. Exploring the economic implications of the shift from an economy driven by capital investment to one focused on consumption, Johnson also noted that the use of durable goods had also changed. Saving for a large initial expenditure was less critical than calculating for the flow of expenditures to follow. Rates of interest and ongoing costs of maintenance were more important than the cost of production in determining the rate of consumption. Moreover, even though the practical benefits of durable goods lingered over time, the goods themselves depreciated rapidly as they became progressively obsolete in an economy driven by change. As *Chatelaine* had observed, changes in the cost of manufacturing compared with changes in the cost of labour were altering the choices consumers made in the marketplace.

It is not easy to grow rich successfully, Johnson observed. It requires a continual

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

process of learning to improve one's tastes and standards, to budget one's income, to invest wisely in the complex consumer capital goods that constitute a modern high standard of living, and to manage one's property and oneself efficiently. The possibilities of failure were considerable. Economic risks were built into the structure of opulent society, which placed a premium on rapid change and innovation. The role of government, Johnson believed, was to help Canadians manage their risks and maximize their opportunities.

While industry and the mass media encouraged Canadians to think of themselves as consumers making choices in the private realm, sociologists and economists sought to re-politicize consumer practices. Some found it objectionable that an ideal presented as normative was in reality approached only with difficulty by the majority of Canadians. Others saw the market at work, and proposed ways for the state to help Canadians adjust to new conditions. The standard package of goods, and particularly the gap between the realities of daily life and this media-created ideal, were the focus of considerable discussion. For industry, the middle class standard represented opportunity in the form of needs to be filled through the sale of goods and services. Sociologists, however, generally saw the standard package as a tool or mechanism of control that created false expectations and exacerbated insecurities.

The hiatus or gap between the constraints of daily life and the middle class ideal supported a range of social projects, on the one hand fueling the desire for "more" that spurred postwar economic expansion, on the other creating conditions that were seen to require a range of therapeutic expertise and economic policies to assist Canadians living in new social and economic conditions. In some cases social scientists entered the market

directly as sellers of therapies promising to help Canadians adjust to the demands and expectations of society. These included a range of experts in the behavioral sciences, ranging from marriage counselors to psychotherapists to child rearing experts. In other cases, the demand for expertise came from government or larger social institutions and called forth studies such as those discussed above. Need—understood as falling short of a widely understood social standard—could be made to serve a variety of projects all intended to help individuals and families adjust or achieve contentment in their lives.

### **The Humanities**

Social scientists saw a society in need of intervention, cultural elites saw consumers in need of better training. Increasing affluence and leisure “both fascinated and repelled” members of the culture lobby, who regretted the time and money spent by Canadians on movies, magazines, commercial radio and sports events.<sup>51</sup> High culture and mass culture had long been discussed as opposing frames of reference: the one persistent, stable and productive of meaning; the other short-lived, transient and passive. In the postwar period the most conservative faction among the cultural elite continued to emphasize culture as “the best which has been thought and said” and to reject mass culture as a viable basis for citizenship. However, a second position emerged that understood high culture as a repertoire of techniques, experiences and standards. These alternative perspectives were valued as a means to restore the potential for moral and ethical decision-making in a mass society.

By the later 1940s fear of a post-war recession had begun to dissipate. The economy had stabilized and the average work week was shortening (from 48.2 hours in

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 87.

1945 to 44.8 hours in 1950).<sup>52</sup> Canadian families were increasingly enthusiastic participants in a consumer economy driven by advertising, mass production and mass consumption, of cultural experiences as well as so many other goods and services. Canada's elites saw in these changes a crisis of mass culture. At the same time, the state discovered its own interest in the promotion of high culture.<sup>53</sup> In 1949 these concerns combined to bring about the creation of a Royal Commission of Arts Letters and Sciences.<sup>54</sup>

Rallying to protect society, Canada's intelligentsia did not so much reject the idea of consumption as reject the wrong sort of consumption. Canadian achievement, as the Commission's final *Report* asserted, "depends mainly on the quality of the Canadian mind and spirit. This quality is determined by what Canadians think, and think about; by

<sup>52</sup> John Porter, "Canadian Social Structure: A Statistical Profile (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), p. 91.

<sup>53</sup> Liberal Minister Brooke Claxton, for example, identified "people who read books" as a promising constituency. Future Prime Minister Lester Pearson suggested that increasing the vibrancy of the arts and letters would improve Canada's international reputation. Increased awareness of national history and tradition would lend authority to the claims of the federal government, and strengthen sense of belonging among Canadians and to underline their distinction from Americans. As the state's interest in consumption shifted from the economic to the symbolic, government became positively disposed to the consideration of the cultural problems identified by cultural elites. Litt, pp. 106-107.

<sup>54</sup> Two thorough studies have been written examining intellectual anti-modernism and the elite cultural critique that emerged in Canada in the immediate post-war years. Paul Litt's *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* explores the proceedings of the Royal Commission as the centerpiece of this discussion, examining in considerable detail the contexts that gave shape to the proceedings as well as the voluminous briefings, hearings, and reports. Philip Massolin offers provides a broader examination of anti-modernism, examining change from the perspective of its social and moral critics. He similarly regards the Massey Commission as the key historical event around which these critics rallied in their battle to articulate and defend the values and traditions of high culture. Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).



the books they read, the pictures they see and the programmes they hear."<sup>55</sup> Opposing mass culture, the culture lobby pitted itself against business and technology, believed instead that society should be guided by the values and especially the processes implicit in high culture.<sup>56</sup>

One of the distinguishing characteristics credited to high culture was that it required work or effort in the form of contemplation, reasoning, evaluation and selection in order to be appreciated. Engagement with high culture was seen as a productive process geared, not to the production of things, but to the production of better persons. Mass culture, by appealing to the widest possible audience, stood in the way of improvement. Easily available (both affordable and requiring little apparent intellectual effort), it swamped the market and "crowded out"<sup>57</sup> more appropriate forms of cultural experience. Far from belonging to the privileged or the enlightened, high culture needed to be disseminated to all Canadians in order to stave-off the debilitating effects of mass society. The distinctively Canadian quality of the Canadian people, commissioners determine, was not their susceptibility to the lure of mass culture but their potential for self improvement. With appropriate leadership and educational reforms, Canadians would reject forms of culture that were mass produced and mass consumed.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951, *Report*, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951), p. 271. The high infrastructure costs required by new forms of media was an additional strain on efforts to disseminate forms of culture supported by the nation's cultural elites. Because the elitism which gave high culture its social significance inherently limited its appeal, many of the national institutions which the intelligentsia worked to build since the 1920s found it difficult to compete in an economy built around systems of large scale production and distribution.

<sup>56</sup> The following paragraph draws on Litt. p, 251-253.

<sup>57</sup> Massolin, p. 178.

<sup>58</sup> Working within the confines of the Royal Commission, conservative critics made efforts to temper the inherent elitism of their views, although outside of the Commission,

The Commission drew on earlier associations of nationalism and high culture to build a case for government assistance. Both the production side and the consumption side of high culture would receive aid through policies that included limiting competition from undesirable foreign imports and bolstering the Canadian production of desirable culture. Rather than maintaining the gap between elite and popular culture, the Commission sought to reach across or narrow the divide, seeking to make high brow culture available to all Canadians in a public sphere. They demonstrated few qualms about using the technologies of mass media to accomplish this end, but understood that the economics of the mass market would not sustain high culture. State involvement would be needed to forge a common high culture.

Although the Commission condemned the "pseudo-freedoms" of consumer society, its discussion of high culture often mirrored the instrumental logic of capitalism.<sup>59</sup> The intelligentsia, much like the advertising agency, regarded consumption practices as susceptible to the guidance of experts. Employing the metaphors of consumption, they often evoked the very processes they condemned, proposing that high

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they were more straightforward. Litt, p. 84. The discussion of education reform offers a case in point. Seeing education as critical to the development of the arts and sciences, but "off-limits" in the context of the report, Hilda Neatby, a member of the Commission and one of Canada's most conservative social critics, prepared an independent study, the cost of which was underwritten by Massey. Neatby explained that her efforts were motivated by "the apparent indifference of the experts to the disappearance of the old-fashioned concept of the 'educated person' who chose to rest his reputation on his bearing and conversation, rather than on degrees and 'research.' . . . All psychological services, all devices of mental hygiene, excellent as they may be," she observed, "are no substitute for the disciplining of the mind and the developing of the character through contact with the greatest deeds and the greatest characters of all ages." Neatby's critique was well received by those who shared these concerns, however the position she represented was becoming increasingly marginal to the discussion of cultural change. Hilda Neatby, *So Little for the Mind* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Company Ltd. 1953), p. vii, 330.

<sup>59</sup> Litt, p. 252.

culture offerings would "whet" the appetites of the Canadian public and create a demand for more. Intellectuals shared with advertisers and the mass magazine the understanding that consumption—whether of vacuum cleaners and hairstyles or literature and philosophical thought-- could improve lives.

At the same time, the Commission carried forward what cultural historian Paul Litt has called "habitual points of reference," evaluating cultural activity as high or low and associating high culture with national development. The spectre of wartime propaganda and rising cold war tensions gave cultural questions particular relevance.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, mass culture was seen not as popular expression, but as a repressive force. In the next decade this dichotomy would become economically and politically untenable and intellectually unsustainable.<sup>61</sup> Patriotic Canadians would support the idea of state-sponsored culture, but they failed to renounce mass culture. High culture idealists, defining themselves in opposition to the mass culture, found it difficult to popularize their commitments.

Although the Massey Commission sought to address the larger implications of mass consumption, it had largely ignored the private spending choices of ordinary Canadian families. This was precisely the area of consumption that interested literary scholar Marshall McLuhan. Returning to Canada after studying with the well-known British conservative literary critic F. R. Leavis, McLuhan decided to prepare a guidebook to advertisements that would teach readers to "see things as they really are."<sup>62</sup> McLuhan

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<sup>60</sup> Litt, p. 249.

<sup>61</sup> Litt, p. 251.

<sup>62</sup> In a well-publicized 1930 manifesto, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*, Leavis had argued that modern man had "lost all powers of discrimination." Leavis laid the blame on machine technology which had destroyed the old ways of life and, because of

shared Leavis' well known concerns about the destructive impact of commercial culture; however, he was not convinced that studying "the greats" could solve the crisis of modernity or compete successfully with the "unofficial program of education" carried on by commerce through the press, the radio and the movies. The rhetoric of the ad-man and the Hollywood movie industry set the behavioral patterns and shared language of daily experience, altering perceptions of reality. Manipulating society's subrational impulses and appetites, ad men revealed the primary motivations of large areas of contemporary existence. Their purpose, however, was not understanding but exploitation for profit.

Under the pressure of these efforts, society had taken on "the character of the kept women whose role is expected to be submission and luxurious passivity. Each day brings its addition of silks, trinkets, and shiny gadgets, new pleasure techniques and new pills for pep and painlessness."<sup>63</sup> Culture became a matter of consumption rather than discernment, perception and judgment.<sup>64</sup> As this insidious passivity spread, it required an exceptional degree of awareness and "an especial heroism of effort to be anything but supine consumers of processed goods."<sup>65</sup> The myths of mass consumer society

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continuous rapid change, prevented the emergence of new traditions. The literary tradition and the small minority able to appreciate it were all that remained of western culture. It was up to this elite group to preserve the most essential creative achievements and to stop further decent into the abyss of modernity, which, Leavis argued, was progressively destroying the individual functions of intelligence, choice, will and critical judgment. Mathew Hilton, "The Legacy of Luxury: Moralities of Consumption since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Volume 4 (1), 2004, pp. 110-111.

<sup>63</sup> Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951), p. 21. The title, McLuhan explained, referenced the Hollywood glamour girl, alluding to both technology and the distortion of culture by the economics of mass production and mass consumption.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



discouraged thinking and supported the political and economic power structure. Homogenized commercial culture directed attention away from pressing social problems. Conformity to the advertising ideal required money, binding people to jobs and to the big cities where most of the jobs were.<sup>66</sup>

Insofar as popular compliance was gained through cultural means, McLuhan believed that the methods of cultural analysis developed by Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt to study the Italian Renaissance could become tools of social criticism.<sup>67</sup> Exposing the illusions of consumerism would render the techniques of persuasion impotent and break the grip of mass culture. Reason, in the form of cultural analysis, would restore freedom by providing the understandings needed to perceive and withstand the pressures industry exerted to compel consumption.

While McLuhan emphasized the means used to "paralyze" the minds of consumers, Canadian philosopher George Grant insisted that the problems of modernity were not problems of means but involved the need to choose ends that would give meaning to life. It was not the consumer choices but the moral choices, Grant argued, that defined human being.

Although North America was the first mass consumption society, Grant argued that it was far from exceptional. Mass society was "the condition of life towards which all human beings are moving."<sup>68</sup> Increasing technological mastery led to increasing individual acquisition, regardless of whether people lived under capitalist, socialist, or

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>68</sup> George Grant, "An Ethic of Community" in Michael Oliver (ed.), *Social Purpose for Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 6.

communist regimes.<sup>69</sup> But Grant asked, as physical survival came to require less time, what would give life its meaning and purpose?<sup>70</sup>

Modernity, according to Grant, raised profound questions of what constituted right and wrong. Pandering to the "mediocrity of desire," the nation's leaders no longer struggled to understand what was truly worth desiring. The power of technology to increase leisure and freedom was being subverted by society's emphasis on economic expansion.<sup>71</sup> For Grant, the appropriate ends were not the realization of material ends, which he equated with crude hedonism, but with personal moral freedom. Those who advocated alternative political ideologies should be competing, not with promises of more goods, but with "judgments as to which activities realize our full humanity and which inhibit it."<sup>72</sup>

Born in Toronto in 1918 to a family with longstanding commitments to religion, education and social reform, Grant brought an increasingly conservative perspective to the critique of contemporary Canada. As Grant understood it, the age of progress was characterized by ambiguity: although the production of commodities eased life and enabled the mass of ordinary people to live in comfort and affluence, the erosion of shared myths of the meaning and common purpose had hollowed out the heart of

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>71</sup> George Grant, "The Minds of Men in the Atomic Age," in H. D. Forbes, (ed.), *Canadian Political Thought*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 285, 286, 288. In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant explicitly linked the elimination of the Canadian nation with the creation of increased possibilities for mass consumption. National integrity was inconsistent with the economic goals of mass society. George Grant, *The Collected Works of George Grant* (A. Davis and P. Emberley, ed.) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 276, 341. See also George Grant, *Philosophy in a Mass Age* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959), p. 2 ff.

<sup>72</sup> Grant, "An Ethic of Community," p. 13.

society.<sup>73</sup> Corporate capitalism, focused on profits and consumption, bred spiritual poverty in the midst of affluence. The media, by glorifying society "as it is," helped Canadians to accept these limits. Art no longer appealed to transcendent truths. Entertainment kept people happy by identifying "life as it is with life as it ought to be." Universities pursued only useful knowledge and provided the personnel to manage society.<sup>74</sup> The social sciences refined the mechanisms of control until individuals became objects to be administered by scientific efficiency experts.<sup>75</sup> Economic expansion had become an end rather than a means, cutting people off from a truer vision of life.<sup>76</sup>

In the sixties, Grant began to locate consumer experiences in the realm of Nietzsche's last men, who had no aspirations beyond their "pitiable comfort."<sup>77</sup> Grant believed that the loss of higher purposes signified the destruction of human potentialities for nobility and greatness. When happiness became a goal to be realized in the present by all, its content had to be shrunk to fit "what can be realized by all."<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> George Grant, "The Good or Values," in William Christian and Sheila Grant (ed.), *The George Grant Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 393.

<sup>74</sup> George Grant, "Technology and Empire," in *The Collected Works of George Grant*, p. 476.

<sup>75</sup> Grant, *Philosophy in a Mass Age*, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> George Grant, "The Minds of Men in the Atomic Age," in H. D. Forbes, (ed.), *Canadian Political Thought*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 285, 286.

<sup>77</sup> 'We have discovered happiness,' say the last men and blink." Grant, "Teaching What Nietzsche Taught," in Forbes, p. 437.

<sup>78</sup> Grant, *Time as History*, pp. 31, 33. Using Nietzsche as a guide, Grant argued that those who dwelled in modern times were either nihilists, who saw all values as relative and "the last men," who inherited the Enlightenment ideals of happiness and equality. The first path led to the rule of force and the likelihood of atomic annihilation insofar as the utter absence of limits allowed for extreme and radical acts of individualism, untempered by concern for the interests of others. The second path led to the rule of mediocrity and the banal happiness of mass liberalism. In *Time as History*, Grant proposed that these insights were potentially therapeutic insofar as individuals, "knowing themselves beyond good and evil," were free to reject mass society, free to make their own history and in doing so to make the technological world a place where richness of

McLuhan, focusing on the means of cultural transmission, proposed to utilize techniques of analysis which had been developed to study high culture on mass culture in order to restore freedom of choice. Grant called upon modern men and women to reach beyond the limits of daily life in a world remade by technology. Beauty, joy and justice pointed to aspects of human experience which Grant believed lay beyond commodification and beyond technology. Awareness of these experiences, beyond the horizons of the everyday, could lead individuals beyond the limits of the mundane. The desire for perfection, Grant asserted, makes us less imperfect.<sup>79</sup>

Could longing lead beyond consumerism, or did it merely fuel the effort to find fulfillment through the purchase of new things? While Grant placed these essentially romantic values outside of the market, consumer historian Colin Campbell argues that they played a crucial role in the development of modern consumerism. "The longing to experience in reality those pleasures created and enjoyed in imagination," Campbell argues, spurs the search for meaning through goods.<sup>80</sup> Desire should be seen, not as the opposite but as the essence of the consumer experience. Had Grant in his search for larger perspectives missed the point of consumer society?

Literary critic Northrup Frye offered a different approach, arguing that it was

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life may be discovered. Acceptance of the myth of progress and the internalization of technological imperatives prevented men and women from rising up to remake the world. However, on an existential level, the freedom to will remained. Although the term "Superman" used by Nietzsche to explain the essence of human willing, had been debased by Nazism and destroyed by comic strips and Saturday movie matinees, the possibility of choosing one's own horizons, however difficult and unlikely, remained. See also George Grant, "The Minds of Men in the Atomic Age," in Forbes, *Canadian Political Thought*, pp. 285, 286, and Grant, "Ethics of Community," pp. 220-221.

<sup>79</sup> Grant, *Time as History*, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Era and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 1, 205



through culture rather than Grant's "phenomenology of transcendence" that individuals would find the standards and values to do more than simply adjust to contemporary society. Introducing *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) Frye dismissed the popular notion of a critic as a sort of cultural middleman, positioned between the producer and consumer, "distributing culture to society at a profit to themselves while exploiting the artist and increasing the strain on his public."<sup>81</sup> Literary criticism was not an exercise of taste serving to reinforce class structure, but a practice that aimed to expose values and ideologies and preserve "cultural memory."<sup>82</sup> The consumption of culture through informed critical practice provided an infinite vision of possibilities that would enable society to rise beyond the compulsion of habits and prejudices.<sup>83</sup> The value of culture to society, Frye wrote, emerged through criticism:

It is the consumer, not the producer, who benefits by culture, the consumer who becomes humanized and liberally educated. There is no reason why a great poet should be a wise and good man, or even a tolerable human being, but there is every reason why his reader should be improved in his humanity as a result of reading him. . . . What does improve in the arts is the comprehension of them, and the refining of society which results from it.<sup>84</sup>

Frye conceived of literature as the opposite of commodity culture. Literature stood independent of human history as "an autonomous world that gives us an imaginative perspective on the actual one."<sup>85</sup> The critic, selecting from the tradition, brought literature into relationship with the present, mobilizing the resources of culture to

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<sup>81</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>85</sup> Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to Literary History of Canada (1965)," reprinted in Northrop Frye, *The Stubborn Structure* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 298.

understand and improve society. The tension that emerged between "what is" and "what ought to be" opened a critical path that pointed the way to change.<sup>86</sup>

Critical thinking was linked with the impulse to improve.<sup>87</sup> Literature and culture provided the resources and criticism the tools to sustain, nourish and perpetuate alternative frames of reference. In this context, the goal of education was neither vocational training nor social adjustment, but the cultivation of "maladjustment."<sup>88</sup> "Ordinary" was synonymous with a life of passive consumption, conformity and stability. The critical path recovered a role for traditional culture within a society of affluence and choice.

As critics of mass consumption McLuhan, Grant and Frye tended to minimize the economic dimensions of cultural life, seldom discussing issues such as access to education and affordability. Their understanding of culture took shape in reaction to the specific malaises they saw afflicting their times: loss of meaning, the desire for novelty, distraction and entertainment, the increasing expansion of need, and the power of advertising. Culture was the location of transcendent social bonds; mind and imagination were privileged over material realities as the glue that held society together. While acknowledging the power of capital and communications to set the horizons of action, feeling and thought, they insisted that culture and history provided the resources for alternative visions.

Over time these approaches made it increasingly difficult to maintain qualitative

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<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Hart, *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 181.

<sup>87</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 170.

<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Hart, *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 169-170

distinctions between different forms of culture. Understanding culture as media eroded distinctions between high and popular culture. Spirituality proved no more resistant to commodification than other realms of life experience. Efforts to broaden the discussion of literature from "the best which has been thought and said" to all that has been thought and said cast doubt on culture as an alternative standard. The intellectual community had objected that industry looked to cultural practices as means of revenue generation, but culture itself was an economic activity. In fact, high culture was becoming a market segment within consumer society rather than a critical position outside of society.

In an obvious way this emphasis on culture as an antidote to mass consumption was self-serving. Elites dominate through culture only when the pattern of high-low distinctions is widely held. Status converts to power only when people pay deference.<sup>89</sup> Committed to a tradition that was losing its legitimacy as a guide to superior values, cultural elites sought to reaffirm the importance of the mind during a time when material promise seemed disturbingly unlimited. As the realm of consumer capitalism expanded, and as the social sciences made ordinary life a more acceptable subject of academic study, it became increasingly difficult to root academic purpose in the need to preserve a realm of high culture against the surrounding environment of commerciality and homogenization.<sup>90</sup>

By the late sixties, conservative critics were increasingly aware of their own marginality. References to contemporary Canada as a consumer society were pervasive,

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<sup>89</sup> French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has shown that high culture depends as much on the "refusal" of vulgar culture (the culture of the people) as upon the exercise of specific knowledge and judgments. It is the overall pattern of distinction which is critical in establishing and maintaining barriers between classes. Bourdieu, see especially pp. 482-483, 486ff.

<sup>90</sup> Storey, pp. 68-70.

even if the significance of the concept remained contested. Those seeking alternatives to mass consumption (whether in high culture or counter-culture) increasingly found them within the framework of consumer society. The radical rejection of mainstream values represented by "dropping out" was not an option for those who sought public influence. Seeing consumerism as a dominant influence did not foreclose all possibilities for change, however, it would be necessary for those who sought to resist or challenge the dominance of mass consumerism to reach for different approaches.



## 12. Conclusion

In its material aspect, the culture of consumer society has been shaped by the increases in affluence that resulted from steady rises in income and productivity. However, the dimensions of consumer culture reach well beyond the commodity form and the presence of more goods and more money to buy them. Each chapter of this dissertation explores an aspect of the intellectual response to changing patterns of consumption, and reveals a link in an evolving way of imagining Canada as a consumer society.

### Resisting Consumerism

New ways of thinking about consumption emerged in response to rising abundance and new choices, however certain themes persisted even as Canada changed. Criticism of consumerism between the 1890s and 1960s emphasized three areas of concern: the undermining of producer values, escalations in inequality and social tension, and the degrading effects of mass culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, many social critics regarded the emergence of an urban industrial society organized around wage earning and bought goods with dismay, seeing in these changes the un-making of a stable agrarian oriented society and the collapse of moral order.

Those who spoke for traditional values of hard work and self-discipline refused to accept comforts and conveniences available in the marketplace as normal and good. Spending choices that were far from extravagant were seen as such when set against the sometimes idealized traditions of self-denial, thrift and prudence. As the purchase of food, clothing and shelter came to be accepted as normal, disparities in the distribution of goods, that is in the ability to buy them and in their presumed desirability, were seen to

amplify class distinctions. The gap between made-in America images and the realities of Canadian purchasing power was consistently identified as a source of social discontent. The need for income to satisfy an expanding list of wants might drive a wedge between wage earners and wage spenders. The middle class ideal was commonly described as a false representation and distortion of reality, leveraged by the advertising industry and the powerful to manipulate Canadians. Social critics continued to associate consumption with indebtedness and instability, both within the family and within individuals torn between unresolvable value commitments.

Mass culture continued to be rejected by the intellectual and cultural minority long after the consumption of ordinary goods in daily life came to be seen a legitimate entitlement of citizenship. While high culture was understood as an ennobling effort, loftily removed from the realm of commerce and daily life, popular culture was associated with the realm of entertainment, shaped by business imperatives. After WWII, a new theme was added when it was suggested that the material advances made possible through the mass market encouraged complacency and apathy. Refusing one set of values as short-lived, trivial and corrosive, Canada's intellectual and cultural elite proposed a surprisingly traditional alternative, rooted in pre-modern visions of the land and the folk. In the context of rapid social and cultural change, the rejection of mass culture should be seen as part of an effort to maintain the value of those trained in highly specialized forms of cultural knowledge. Identifying culture as the location of transcendent social bonds, intellectuals continued to privilege mind and imagination over material relations.

### **Encouraging Better Consumption Choices**

While businessmen, politicians, and the mass media were loudest in the celebration of material plenty, there were also those in the intellectual community who associated increases in productivity with the potential for a more abundant life. Alongside the vehement rejection of consumerism ran a second discourse which emphasized the utopian potential of increased consumption. Many of the country's turn of the century intellectuals were convinced that society's surplus would allow even working class Canadians to direct their efforts to the pursuit of personal, cultural, or spiritual improvement. Others insisted that the interests Canadians shared as consumers held the potential to overcome the class differences created by industrial capitalism. Intellectuals did not, for the most part, endorse material gain as an end in itself, but believed that material sufficiency would allow Canadians to pursue higher ends.

After World War II these aspirations took on an increasingly prescriptive and often materialistic tone. The desire to divert consumer spending to proper channels saw the role of intellectual and cultural elites progressively transformed from the provision of moral guidance to the provision of expertise, often incorporating intellectual effort into the consumer economy. Experts in the consumerist cause offered a wide range of advice intended to help Canadians participate responsibly in the material opportunities of consumer society. Many of Canada's traditional intellectuals adopted a similar strategy, proposing that training in cultural analysis and critical thinking would help all Canadians to make better choices.

It was difficult for Canada's intelligentsia to come to terms with the egalitarian implications of mass consumption. Committed to a tradition that was losing its social

position and legitimacy as a guide to superior values and life ways, their sense of loss was genuine. Even those who accepted that Canada had become a consumer society maintained that knowledge and freedom come through disciplined education and the study of social conditions rather than an abundance of things. After the Second World War efforts to align intellectual and cultural practice with the strategies of consumerism supported the entrenchment of a consumer ethic, suggesting that by the late fifties intellectuals generally recognized the dominance of the consumerist ethos, although they continued to question its merit.

### **Normative Understandings**

The growth of consumer society occurred in tandem with the rise of managerial techniques. The organizational revolution was a precondition of consumer society, not only increasing the productivity of industry, but also restructuring relations of production in a way that created an opening for the articulation of consumer interests. After the turn of the century, measuring inflation placed the consuming practices of ordinary Canadians in the spotlight. The statistical effort to determine changes in the cost of living aggregated individual acts of consumption, building awareness of a common consumer interest. The measurement and documentation of everyday purchases imposed coherence on new practices, undercutting reactionary interpretations of consumption as the product of self indulgent or irrational behaviour by presenting it as normal, ordinary and widely shared.

The statistician's need for categories helped to produce the idea of a Canadian standard of living independent of the purchasing decisions of any one family. The concept, essentially an organizing tool, became one of the most referenced themes in the discussion of Canadians consumption. Once calculated, the Canadian standard of living



attained a factual status that allowed it to be utilized for a variety of purposes, both to assist and to criticize changes in consumer spending.

Establishing the pervasiveness of new consumer practices built support for a consumer oriented vision of Canadian society. Citizenship became associated with the entitlement to a decent standard of living. The ability to participate in the economy of spending and accumulation became fused with participation and membership in a democratic society. Increasingly government was called upon to provide the means to realize this objective, whether by assuring jobs to those able to work or by providing some form of subsidy to those unable to secure sufficient income through work.

### **Economics**

Even though they considered rising standards of living as evidence of national progress, Canadian economists were seldom willing to acknowledge the importance or even the potential importance of domestic consumption as a means to grow the economy. Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that support for a broadly shared consumer interest has been strongest when consumption was seen to be most difficult, threatened by inflation, by depression, or by the needs of war when good citizens were called upon to demonstrate their loyalty by complying with consumption restrictions. Each crisis (inflation, depression and war) expanded the state's power to shape the economy, specifically authorizing government to regulate prices and wages, and impose taxes in the interests of the nation and in greater fairness to its citizens. Intellectual opinion as a whole often acted as a reverse indicator of consumer well-being: support for consumption was strong when the consumer was weak, while periods of increasing consumption were met with moral condemnation and the questioning of motivations.

### **Canada as a Consumer Society**

By the early 1960s, in spite of variations in the ability and willingness of Canadians to participate in a society geared to the purchase, display and frequent replacement of goods and services, Canada recognized itself as a consumer society. The discussion of change embedded considerable tension into the understanding of consumer society, even as it secured the hegemony or dominance of consumerism as a way of being. The result was a layering of contradictory messages that privileged some forms of spending over others, drawing distinctions that were in many ways untenable if fully explored.

### **The Functions of Intellectuals**

Conceptualizing Canada as a consumer society involved a number of intellectual procedures. Most obviously discussion, regardless of whether it aimed to restrict, to redirect or to encourage spending, put new practices on the public agenda. Efforts to measure the consumption practices of Canadians, to establish common terms of reference and develop models of society structured around consumer behaviours made new practices visible. What was normative became recognized as normal, ordinary and widespread. While the intellectual community did not particularly seek to conceal or repress alternative interpretations of Canadian society, the new emphasis on consumption allowed other aspects of the Canadian social experience to fall from view.

Beginning in the interwar period, the identification of culture as the proper realm of intellectual resistance served to contain but also to marginalize the opposition from within the intellectual community. Carrying forward tradition helped to maintain the legitimacy of the social order during a time of rapid change without threatening the

emergence of new social forms and practices. At the same time, increasing quantities of prescriptive literature from a wide range of authorities offered stability and direction in a society of abundance and choice.

Often efforts aimed at resisting the impact of change served also to advance new understandings, making it difficult to tell which side of the ledger a particular representation or interpretation fell. Ultimately it was through collective discussion, by setting the limits of public discourse, by distinguishing between what was and what was not relevant, what was and what was not possible, what could be done and what should not be done, that Canada's intellectual and cultural elites gave form to consumer society. While Canadian consumerism emerged in conjunction with other aspects of modernity, new practices and understandings were shaped by public discussion as well as by economic influences and inherited social forms. A nationally distinctive vision was shaped by decades of discussion.

As a consumer ethos became dominant, Canada's intellectual community increasingly saw itself as marginalized by the direction of change. Seeking to reaffirm the importance of the mind during a time when material promise seemed disturbingly unlimited, they increasingly understood their role as one of offsetting the totalizing tendencies of consumerism, capitalism and bureaucracy. Maintaining society's ability to change was linked with the development of critical self-awareness. Culture and history were understood to offer the resources for the renewal of meaning. Acts of reflection, contemplation and imagination had the power to offset constraints that were seen as both material and social in nature, and to restore the potential for moral and ethical decision-making. Canadian historians of consumer society place themselves within this tradition.

arguing that studying the formation of consumer society will reveal opportunities for change within and alongside the dominant trend.<sup>1</sup>

Representing ourselves as consumers, we reference particular patterns of thinking and set in motion particular ways of doing. We construct relations with other people and also with things, and express our identities in ways that are both imagined and material. Recognizing each other as consumers, however, does not deny the possibility of different identities, including different consumer identities. The hegemony of consumerism does not preclude the possibility of expressing other moral and ethical concerns. As Canada's intellectuals always understood and as this study makes clear, our cultural values, ethics, practices and commitments should be seen as ongoing projects rather than accomplished conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Parr, *Domestic Goods*, pp. 5-6, 9-10, 268; and the writings of the historically oriented Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14 (1), 2001.



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